No. 3, Vol. 34 TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

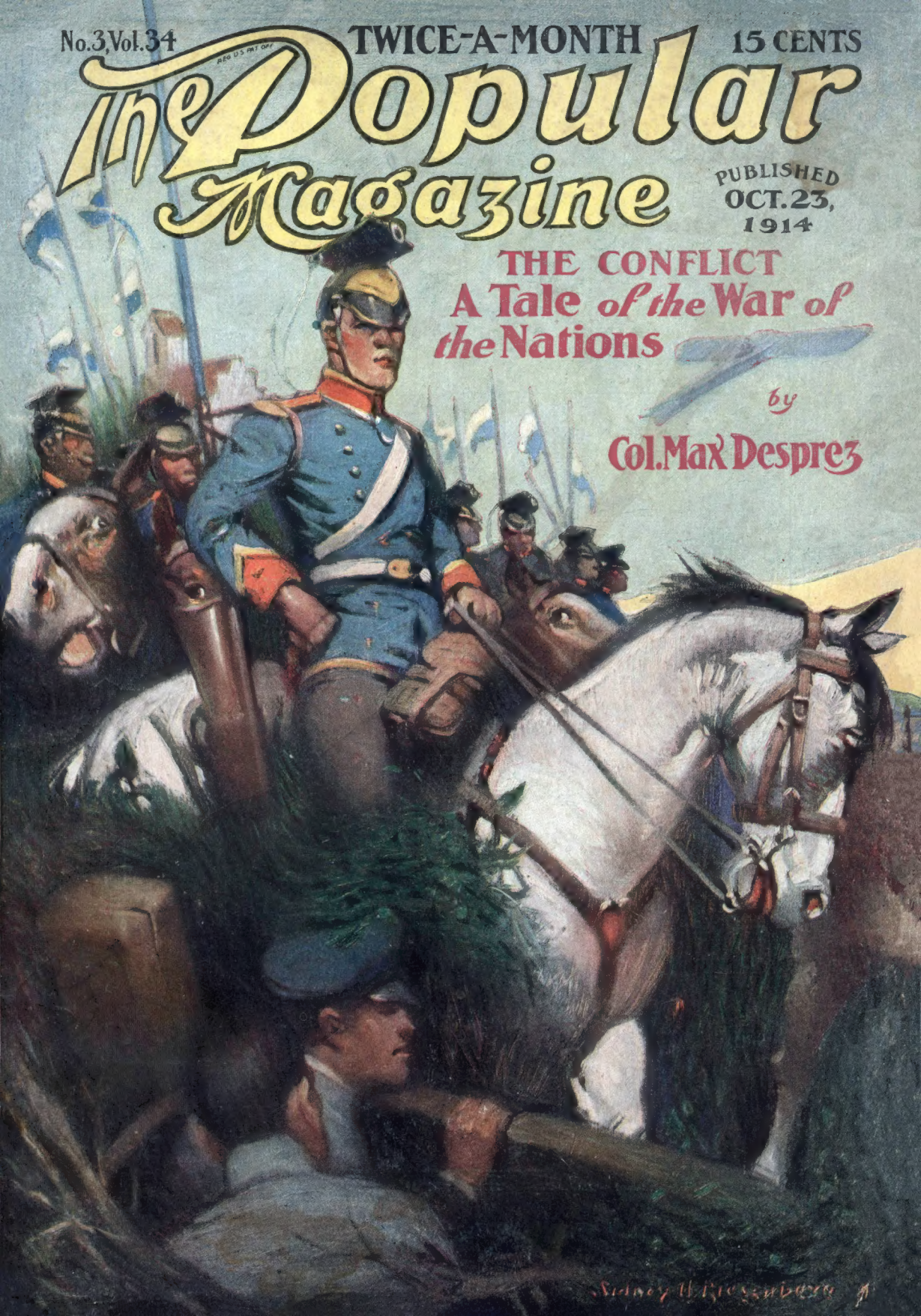
The Popular Magazine

PUBLISHED OCT. 23, 1914

THE CONFLICT
A Tale of the War of the Nations

by

Col. Max Desprez



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Twice-a-Month Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York.
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Entered at New York Post Office as Second-class Matter, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.
Canadian Subscription, $3.72. Foreign, $4.44.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $3.00 SINGLE COPIES 15 Cents

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXIV. OCTOBER 23, 1914. No. 3.

The Double Cross

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Wall Between," "The Stroke Oar," Etc.

We have to thank a level-headed President for avoiding the horrors of a war with Mexico. What went on under the surface of the Mexican imbroglio is known to but few men. Paine lifts a corner of the curtain and, in a novel that illustrates the loyalty and disloyalty of newspaper men, gives us a glimpse of things that will stir the wrath of every friend of Mexico and the United States. It is a fine study of the temperaments of two men and a girl, as well as a picture of war in the making.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

GLANCING at the telegram in his hand, the managing editor of the Philadelphia *Tribune* shivered as with cold, although the steam-heated office had the warmth of summer. He walked to the nearest window and stared out at the snow which pelted in icy squalls that obscured the traffic of the street. Through a cañon between the tall buildings the northeast wind drove in a strident gale, its voice a long booming note like the chant of surf. Bitter winter to face, even in the city's sheltered thoroughfares. Those whose business took them to and fro were blue-lipped, benumbed, miserable.

The managing editor was an autocrat with an imagination. Herein was a reason for his success. He saw news stories and he also felt them, living intensely in the daily records of turbulent humanity so sordid and so tragic and so romantic. These emotions were not for others to see. At thirty-five he was grave and self-repressed, his demeanor that of a much older man, the pleasant smile infrequent. He seemed to brood over this particular telegram before he picked up the desk telephone and spoke to the city editor:

"What is Stannard doing this afternoon? Have you given him an assignment?"

"Not yet. I have nothing very important for him. Do you want him?"

"If you please. Send him in. Er—how is he feeling? That cough any better? He looked rather seedy when I met him in the hall yesterday."

"Fine, so he says, and right on the

job, as usual. I tried to make him take a couple of days off."

In the city room, now almost emptied of reporters, a long, loose-jointed young man tilted back in a chair with his feet cocked upon a radiator, and his hands clasped behind his head. He appeared to be a stranger to impatience, and unacquainted with excitement. His air of loafing contentment was incongruous in this feverish atmosphere, where things were done at top speed. At the summons of the city editor he forsook his snug corner and crossed the room, tranquil and deliberate, to stand with hands in his pockets and his shoulders slouching a trifle. There was a humorous twinkle in his black eyes; and his face, thin and rather pale, became animated as he said, jerking a thumb over his shoulder:

"The boss desires my presence? Did I hear you tell him something about my health? I suppose he'd like to know whether I'm strong enough to stand the shock of being fired. What is my crime? A libel suit on that bank-failure story, or did I spell somebody's name wrong?"

"He didn't use that tone of voice, Stannard. Now trot along. You are always expecting the worst."

The reporter drifted in the direction of the managing editor's room, softly whistling a ragtime measure. His entrance was so light-footed that the autocrat, absorbed in his work, was taken unawares. Looking up, he greeted the young man with that kindly, infrequent smile of his, and offered him the telegram which had caused him to shiver. Stannard read it aloud slowly, dwelling with each poignant phrase:

Lewes, Jan. 21. Wind seventy miles. Zero temperature. Three schooners piled up on Breakwater. Another iced up and helpless in lower bay. Big steamer ashore below Cape, and liable to break up to-night. Life-saving crews unable get people off. Towboat and barges stranded on outer shoals. Worst storm for shipping in years. Shall I cover story? BRENNAN.

"Brennan is our local man at Lewes," explained the managing editor, "but all he is good for is to do the routine stuff of Delaware Breakwater. It is a big story, Stannard, and you are the man to tackle it. The afternoon train will land you at Lewes shortly after dark. But I am not ordering you to go, I want you to understand that. It will be a wicked night on the beach. You are not any too robust, and if you feel that it is unwise, I shall not count it against you. This is a volunteer assignment. I really ought not to put it up to you at all, but——"

"But you think I can handle the story," said Stannard. "Why, I wouldn't miss going to Lewes if I had to be carried to the train on a stretcher. And, really, I feel in bully good shape to get away with it. That cough of mine was a false alarm. Too many cigarettes. I have cut them out."

The managing editor had his doubts, but he kept them to himself. Scrawling an order to the cashier for expense money, he observed briefly, in farewell:

"You need no instructions. This telegram tells it all. To think of all those people freezing and drowning out there, and night coming on——"

He winced and began to busy himself with other tasks. Frederick Stannard lingered a moment, perhaps wishing to thank the other man for showing a personal interest in his welfare. As a cog in the news machine he was not expecting solicitude. But the interview was obviously finished, and the reporter returned to the local room to get his hat and ulster. In his heart was the quiet elation of the picked man, of the good soldier given an arduous billet because he surpassed his comrades.

He was about to go to the railway station when there strolled magnificent-

ly across his path a florid, portly personage in a fur-lined coat. A stranger might readily have thought him to be the owner of the *Tribune*. At close range, however, there were flaws in his make-up. He was a little frayed and battered behind that imposing front. Large and rotund was the voice with which he hailed Stannard:

"Whither away, Fred? What's your hurry? I'm off on an important assignment, very important."

"Always important, aren't you?" was the ungracious reply. "I suppose you will sit in the back room of Eisenwebber's saloon and fake your assignment on a day like this."

"Ss-s-h, not so loud," cautioned William Marmaduke Mannice, as he grasped Stannard's arm and hauled him into a corner of the hall. "You are only joshing me, but the old man might hear. He is sore on me about something or other. I'll admit to you that in weather like this a reporter is justified in using his imagination instead of his legs. And the brute of a city editor expects me to go way out to Chestnut Hill."

"It would be cruelty to a dumb animal, you're right," replied the unsmiling Stannard.

Mannice tapped him on the chest with a declamatory finger, and confided in plaintive accents:

"You are the star man and the office pet. You don't have to bother your head about local-room politics. They are handing me a raw deal, trying to crowd me off this rotten sheet. Do I get a chance at a really big, juicy story? Nit. Why, my space bills on the New York *Chronicle* used to run into three figures."

"I fear that Philadelphia is not big enough for a top-liner like you," solemnly responded Stannard, trying to dodge out of reach. "If I wasn't just naturally a courteous gent, I'd ask how your rum bills used to run."

William Marmaduke Mannice ignored the insult and followed the insulter into the elevator, clinging even closer when he perceived that Stannard was making for the cashier's window in the business office.

"If you could spare a few dollars until Friday—unexpected demands—a position to keep up——" suggested Mannice.

The other reporter laughed a mirthless "ha, ha!" and reluctantly handed over a two-dollar note, first kissing it good-by.

"The customary touch, but not as deftly done as usual," said he. "You are in poor form. I wonder why I give up? We all wonder."

"A less good-natured chap than I might take offense at that," blandly replied Mannice. "Thanks. Friday, sure, old man, the minute I lay hands on my beggarly salary envelope. Have a snifter before we buck the elements?"

"Nothing doing. I am on the wagon, and it's cold riding, but the quickest way I know to freeze to death is to stoke up on booze."

Stannard plunged in chase of a trolley, and the opulent fur coat presently vanished behind the swinging doors of a little place across the street, where the bartender served them piping hot with a sprinkling of nutmeg. During the slow and lonely railroad journey down the shore of Delaware Bay, Stannard diverted himself with whimsical cogitations concerning that journalistic gentleman of fortune, Captain William Marmaduke Mannice, for such was the title he claimed by reason of an alleged commission in a volunteer regiment during the Spanish-American war. Upon his chin was a long scar which was said to have come from a martial wound, but Stannard, the cynic, preferred to surmise that the bearer had wandered into a wire fence during a period of mental eclipse.

There was neither loyalty nor truth

in him, and yet he was somehow tolerated. As an interviewer, he could not be rebuffed, and superficially his manners were ingratiating. When he chose to exert himself, he could get news and write it with the skill of the born reporter. Sooner or later, however, he was sure to be tripped by some flagrant job of faking his facts, which was why he had worked on many newspapers in divers parts. He both amused and irritated Stannard, who had come straight from college to the *Tribune* staff. He found in Mannice a type almost extinct, the roving, irresponsible newspaper man with a thirst who has sufficient native ability to keep from going under.

Stannard's idle thoughts were banished when the train began to skirt the wide reaches of the lower bay, and his journey was nearing the sea. Upon the wind-whipped gray water tossed the drifting ice, and over the marshes were piled the broken floes. The air was clearing of snow, and the fury of the nor'easter had somewhat diminished, but its violence was still cruel, and the cold intense. The great thoroughfare of shipping, usually so populous, was almost deserted. Here and there a tramp steamer was riding it out at anchor well inshore, not a soul moving on deck. The sailing craft, God help them! had either found harbor elsewhere, or were huddling behind the long arm of the Breakwater, every skipper praying that his vessel might not be the next to break adrift and go crashing into the mighty barrier of granite.

The close of day was drawing nigh, an early twilight, blurred and sad. As the train, buffeted by the clamorous wind, crawled into the little town of Lewes, Stannard rubbed the frost from the car window and dimly discerned the spectral outline of the Breakwater, white with foam and spray, and the riding lights of vessels which still survived. His task had begun. Unconsciously he was recording impressions, his mind as sensitive as a camera film, and these impressions were interpreting themselves in the vivid phrase, the apt and necessary word.

The brakeman told him how to find the small hotel, and he trudged through a street of comfortable, weather-worn houses, almost every one the home of a pilot or retired mariner. Breathless and tingling, he stumbled into the warm haven of a tavern, where an aged landlord of a benevolent countenance was pouring coal into a huge salamander stove. Close by sprawled in wooden armchairs three amphibious creatures in sea boots, shaggy reefers, and tarpaulins who were in process of thawing before they sought the beach again.

"So you're a Philadelphy reporter," piped the landlord. "Glad to see ye. It does beat all how enterprisin' the newspapers are nowadays. Want to know about the wrecks? Well, you'd better set here and hear the news as it's brung in. You look spindlin', young man, and you ain't dressed fit to tromp the beach."

"Perhaps I can borrow some more clothes," said Stannard. "You see, I didn't come down here to hug a red-hot stove."

"Got to see it all, hey? I admire your spunk, but I ain't got much use for your jedgment. I can rig you out with duds, and supper'll be ready soon. Dan Quillman here, the pilot with the red mustache, that's sound asleep, will be ready to go along with you. They drug him in here to rest a spell. He helped the life-savers git three of the crew of the *Mary Hallowell* schooner out of the riggin' before the mainmast fell and killed the rest of 'em."

"Then I can get that end of the story from him," spoke the reporter.

"Not unless he talks in his sleep. As a doer, Dan is chain lightnin', but when

it comes to spillin' words about the doin' of it, he is plumb parsimonious."

At this moment the pilot in question came to with a grunt and a yawn, pulled himself to his feet, and growled:

"More coffee in the pot, Uncle Joe? What in time did you let me snooze for?"

"Because you was almighty near bein' a red-headed corpse, Dan. Here's a young man from a Philadelphy paper —wants to know all about it."

"About the schooner you went out to," suggested Stannard.

"Shucks! We watched for the lull at the turn of the tide, and kept our boat afloat and fetched the people off. That's all there is about it."

"And did your party come through all right?" queried the reporter.

"No. Our boat capsized twice, and one of the life-savers was froze to death in the surf. Hop along with that coffee, Uncle Joe."

"You'll stow a big supper before you set foot outside again," snapped the landlord. "And you'll take good care of this young man from Philadelphy, Dan. He ain't a pickled walrus, like you."

The pilot staggered with weariness and made his way to the dining room. Stannard admired him immensely. Given the chance of better acquaintance, and it might be possible to break through his taciturnity. They ate together, almost in silence, while Uncle Joe garnered a sweater, woolen cap and socks, boots and oilskins. Muffled like a polar bear, Stannard followed Dan Quillman's lantern out into the night and across the sands.

A thin moon rode high behind the clouds. The crews of two life-saving stations had dragged their boats and apparatus to the big steamer ashore below the Cape. Her signals had told them that she was a Paxton line ship from Mexican ports for New York, with twenty passengers and a crew of forty-five men.

"She broke in two amidships just before sundown," the pilot bawled in Stannard's ear, as they struggled through the shifting sand. "The people are all in the after deck houses. The stern end has worked considerably nearer shore. I got word over the phone just before we left the hotel."

The sand whirled into their faces and stung like sleet. With an unbroken sweep the wind came roaring off the Atlantic, and smote them like a bludgeon. Coughing, panting, wiping his eyes, Fred Stannard was chilled to the bone before they had toiled a mile. The strength was going from his legs. He had no reserve store of physical endurance. The nervous energy which was the mainspring of his driving power was a poor thing for battling with such an ordeal as this. Dan Quillman, hardened by exposure from youth, had a heart so warm that no winter weather could chill it. Newspaper men were queer cattle, and he did not pretend to understand them, but he knew pluck when he saw it, and in his estimation Stannard was making good.

"You'll be no use when you reach the steamer," he shouted, grasping the reporter's arm, "and I doubt if you can get there on one stretch. I'll see you as far as the nearest life-saving station, this side of the wreck. You heave to in there for a spell. There'll be somebody to tell you what's going on, and you can join the crowd after a while. The keeper will let you use the government phone into Lewes to send your news to the telegraph office."

"B-bully for you," faltered Stannard, between chattering teeth. "I—I'm all right, t-thank you. I'll peg right along with you. I'm game to go the route."

"You'll do as I say, or I'll punch your head. I never poked my fist into a reporter," thundered Mr. Quillman.

"You're almost on your beam ends right now. A shad-bellied bean pole of a land lubber ought to be kept at home in such a gale o' wind as this."

When the lights of the station gleamed ahead, Stannard was forcibly towed toward this friendly refuge, still protesting, but helpless to resist. The grip of his captor was like that of a steel hawser. Kicking open the door, he addressed the cook, who was making ready to care for more castaways:

"A friend of mine, Dave. All alone, are you? Now treat him right, or I'll boil you in a kettle of your own pea soup. What's the latest?"

"The old man expects to have a breeches buoy workin' before midnight, Dan. And he smells a shift of wind. Mebbe the surf won't be too dirty to launch a boat."

"Fine! Tell this friend of mine every blamed thing you know, and then some."

Wise in his own way was Dan Quillman. No sooner had he departed than the cook began to talk. He had a gift of narrative, and his memory had not been spoiled by too much reading. Dearly he loved an appreciative audience. Dramatically he flourished a ladle and trumpeted the details of one episode after another, while Stannard scribbled his notes and asked shrewd, brief questions. He realized that this was his opportunity to get a story into the next morning's *Tribune*. The big descriptive stuff, the experiences of the survivors, and so on, must wait until the morrow. He had seen and felt enough of the wild and tragic background to fill in the color for this first story. The loquacious cook had beheld the tragedies of the helpless schooners and the stranding of the steamer.

Stannard used the telephone and held the telegraph operator in Lewes while he dictated a dispatch a column long, wasting no words, and yet conveying to those who should read the tidings a sense of man's eternal, bitter warfare with the sea.

"That will have to cover it for tonight," he said to the admiring cook. "Perhaps I can shoot in a late bulletin."

"Right you are, sir. After two or three hours on the beach, you won't feel much like anything but slidin' in between a pile of blankets."

Fortified by this interval within doors, Stannard went out to find the heroic men who were toiling to save the lives of those in fearful peril. He felt ashamed that Dan Quillman should have found him a quitter, a weakling so soon in distress, and he swore to stand by until daylight if necessary. He guided his course toward the lanterns which moved a little way back from the surf that thundered across the shoals and hurled its spray far inland. Soon he was able to descry the black mass of the broken steamer looming against the dim and misty waste of ocean. Her signal rockets no longer cut red gashes in the night. Her people could only wait and cling and hope.

Between them and the merciful land lay a distance of no more than a few hundred feet, the difference between life and death. The fore part of the ship had crumpled as though made of pasteboard, the immense strength of its steel beams and plates brought to naught. The breakers played with them, lifting and twisting and pounding. Stannard felt pity for the ship that had been so fine and indomitable a few hours before. He moved near to the group of figures on the beach, the men of the service with their boats and breeches buoys. They paid him no heed, but stood silent and watchful, uncouth in their ice-incrusted garments. The reporter retreated to a hollow between two low dunes where there was shelter against the cutting edge of the wind, and huddled down

to await the next act of the grim drama.

The storm was passing. Here and there a star gleamed, and the moon disclosed herself among the rifted clouds that went whirling away in ragged masses. The gale had spent its force. Its sweep was no longer destructive. Two or three of the men on the beach flung up their arms and turned to face the westward. The expected shift was coming. Blowing off the land the wind would flatten the surf, tear the crests off the combers, make it possible to propel a line across the wreck. They no more composed a futile tableau. The group stirred in swift, efficient action. Stannard ran down to join them, and was shoved out of the way for his pains. A little later the Lyle gun was fired for the first shot, and the weighted line went soaring high above the surf, to fall short of the steamer's deck. Those on board saw the flash and heard the report. Faint and jubilant, their cheer was borne to the beach.

Another shot, and the line caught and held. It was swiftly fastened to the derrick mainmast of the ship, and the heavy hawser went writhing out as the crew of the Paxton liner hauled with might and main. Then the breeches buoy began to make its swaying journeys back and forth, dipping in the breakers, each time bringing a passenger. Those who were too far gone to walk, when lifted ashore, were carried in carts to the nearest station.

"That mast is about ready to go over the side," shouted one of the keepers. "She's sagged worse every trip. We'll have to take a chance in a boat before long."

They saw the mast sway a few minutes after he spoke the warning. Most of the passengers had been safely landed. The breeches buoy was between the ship and the shore, burdened with another castaway, when the mast vanished and the hawser came washing in with nothing to hold it taut. The rescuers tailed on frantically, running far up the beach with the loose end over their shoulders, while the laden breeches buoy was submerged in the surf. They dragged it clear, but it was empty. The passenger had been washed out, unable to withstand the mighty pull of the breakers.

Fred Stannard had run along the beach and was standing apart from the toilers. Wringing his hands, he groaned while the life-savers were expressing like emotions by swearing earnestly among themselves. Stannard had a glimpse of something tumbling in the foam, a dark object flung abreast of where he stood by the send of the tide alongshore. It might be a piece of wreckage, but he thought of the empty breeches buoy. What he did was instinctive. Stripping off the ulster and sweater, kicking himself out of the clumsy sea boots, he plunged forward with a yell, fearing that the next receding wave might carry the object beyond his reach.

Before he was waist deep, a solid wall of water knocked him flat. He was spun over and over, but he knew how to swim, and somehow he managed to dive beneath the next assaulting wave, and get his head clear until he could fill his lungs with air. The icy temperature stabbed him to the heart. He realized that he could remain conscious no more than a few minutes, but this was his opportunity to redeem himself in Dan Quillman's sight. He would play the game to the finish this time.

And now the floating object was driven straight toward him. He grasped for it, and his fingers locked in cloth, a man's shirt. He had found the passenger lost from the breeches buoy. Trying to shift his grip and keep one arm free, something like a rope whipped about his neck and threatened to strangle him. He fought

to release himself, discovering that one end of the cord was tied around the man's wrist, the other to a small leather bag which he had obviously endeavored to save with himself. The bag was banging Stannard in the face, and, with a last despairing effort, he tore at it to break the hold of the deadly noose.

The cord broke, but his breath was well-nigh gone. He was too feeble to fight much longer. His cramped fingers held fast to the handle of the bag because he could not open them, and his other arm reached out to clutch the body of the man in the surf. The water was so shallow that he could get a footing now and then, but mostly he was submerged. It was in the nick of time that the men on the beach, having heard him yell, formed a chain by holding fast to each other, and yanked him high and dry, along with the passenger he had undertaken to save.

Stannard was still conscious, but the other man was inanimate. The cart had returned from the station, and they were hastily bundled in, after which the surfmen rushed back to the boat which they were about to launch. They did not even bother their heads to ask questions. Such an incident was in the day's work. Only Dan Quillman could have told which was the passenger and which the rescuer.

Stannard was too spent and battered to take further interest in the wreck. It seemed as if he could never be warm again. As the cart moved along the beach, he painfully unpried his fingers from the handle of the little bag. It was made of imitation leather, which the salt water had soaked and softened. The stuff was coming apart like pulp. Stannard conjectured that the contents must be valuable, and he felt responsible for their safety. One side of the bag tore out at a touch, and he fished out a flat packet wrapped in a rubber covering of some sort. This he tucked into a pocket of his ulster. There was nothing else in the bag, the fragments of which he tossed over the side of the cart.

The owner of the packet was not dead, but near it. A doctor had been summoned from Lewes, and he was ministering to those already carried to the station. The cook half dragged Stannard in, and went back to shoulder the insensible passenger. The reporter was about to protest that he needed no care, to show that he was a genuine pickled walrus of the Dan Quillman breed, and, besides, there was the packet to be explained. But the roor seesawed, he seemed to be gazing through a fog, and he fought against making a spectacle of himself by fainting in his tracks. He had a glimpse of the man whom he had saved, a thickset figure, swarthy face, expressing both force and dignity, black mustache and imperial. Stannard heard himself say in a far-away voice:

"The steamer came from Mexican ports. That's what he is. It's a cinch. Some person, too. Whew, but I feel funny."

Thereupon, and for the time being, Mr. Frederick Stannard ceased to be an active member of the staff of the Philadelphia *Tribune*. The doctor and the cook hoisted him into a bunk, and turned to give their attention to the gentleman from Mexico, whose need was more desperate. Later in the night the boats succeeded in bringing off the steamer's crew, and out from Lewes came a stream of vehicles, carriages, buggies, farm wagons. Those who had suffered least from exposure were taken to the hotel and into the homes of the pilots.

Stannard remained in the life-saving station. The doctor would not permit him to be moved. His heart was not behaving well, and his temperature next morning was several degrees above normal. By noon he was delirious, and an urgent mesage was sent to the man-

aging editor of the *Tribune*. The conscience of this autocratic person reproached him. His own physician and a trained nurse departed for Lewes and the life-saving station by the first train available.

"I ought not to have sent the boy down there," he told them. "My zeal for the service outran my sense of humanity."

CHAPTER II.

Fred Stannard languidly opened his eyes and blinked at the sunshine which danced across the blankets of his bunk. Where was he, anyhow? Oh, yes, he remembered. He had collapsed the night before after making that grandstand play in the surf. They had kindly put him to bed. Well, he must be up and doing for a hard day's work. He had missed the best scenes at the wreck. He tried to turn over to look out of the window at the bright, joyous morning, but his head seemed weighted to the pillow. One hand lay outside the blanket. He glanced at it curiously, and wondered why the deuce it should look so scrawny, all knuckles and finger bones. Getting wet ought not to shrink a fellow as though he were a flannel shirt. After vainly trying to raise himself upon his elbow, he murmured pettishly:

"Hanged if I don't believe some joker has strapped me in bed or nailed the blankets down."

Dave, the cook, tiptoed in and raised a warning hand. His honest features expressed unbounded joy, and he was about to offer congratulations, when the patient exclaimed in an uncertain voice:

"Did I sleep through breakfast? What about the steamer? Where are her people? Did they get them off?"

"You certainly did sleep through breakfast," was the emphatic reply. "Oh, yes, all hands was fetched off. Now you better rest a spell longer. I wouldn't try to talk much. A little mild cussin' won't hurt you. It's a healthy symptom."

"Rest? Man, I have a big story to write to-day, and I meant to wire the office to send a camera man down this morning. I never feel very spry when I wake up, but I soon pull myself together. Where are my clothes?"

"In a locker, young man. That big story of yours will be sort of stale, and I guess we won't send for any camera man. It's twelve days since that Paxton line steamer was wrecked."

"What! Twelve days!" gasped the reporter, with which he began to weep, the tears running down his wasted cheeks. He did not exactly know why he was crying. It seemed the easiest thing to do. Dave fished out a handkerchief and wiped the invalid's face. The cook was old enough to be the father of such a young man as this.

"Take it easy, Mr. Stannard. You've been flighty in the maintop, and burning up with fever for nigh a fortnight. The nurse has gone out for a walk on the beach, and I'm standin' a sort of dogwatch over you. Is there any real soothin' topic of conversation that you can suggest, if you're bound to work your jaw tackle in spite of me?"

The reporter was silent, while his mind tried to adjust itself to the inexplicable. Out of life, apart from conscious existence for twelve days! What about the *Tribune* office? Who had been doing his work? It was the first time he had ever fallen down on an assignment. Laboriously he tried to piece together the last things he could remember. He had sent a first night's story. And there was a hardy friend named Dan Quillman, and the more vivid presentiment of a swarthy, stocky gentleman with black mustache and imperial, who had been last seen in a totally water-logged condition. The recollection of him conveyed to Stan-

nard something sinister and unpleasant, as though he had been encountered in the strange land of delirium. He was more like a bad dream than a reality.

"The man from Mexico!" blurted the patient, after a long, abstracted interval. "I did him some small favor like saving his life or something. What about him, Dave? Did he ever come to? I was about to look him over when this twelve-day leave of absence suddenly floored me."

"Him? The general? I wished you'd left him where he was," disgustedly answered the cook. "He was a nuisance. Next time he's shipwrecked he needn't ask any help from me."

"A general, eh? I'm very careful to save only people with some class to them. Privates and corporals I usually let drown. And why was he so unpopular with you?"

"He puffed and he strutted and he swaggered, soon as we bailed the water out of him, and let him stay in bed a day. Treated us like servants, and tried to tip the keeper a five-dollar note. Dan Quillman dropped in to ask about you, and he come near kickin' the pants off General Rodigro Miramar. Three of us had to set on Dan's head and stummick to calm him down."

"The Mexican made it a pleasant house party, didn't he?" drawled Stannard. "Tell me, Dave, did he get the package that was in that jerry-built leather bag of his? I intended giving it to you, but my curtain rang down. It was in an inside pocket of my ulster. Did you find it?"

"That infernal bag!" snorted the cook. "Was there a real bag, honest? He pestered us 'most to death about it. Nobody had seen or heard of it."

"I threw the remains of it out of the cart, I remember now," replied Stannard. "Did he look along the beach?"

"He fairly raked it, besides offerin' a hundred-dollar reward. The next high tide probably carried it out to sea. He talked of goin' through your clothes, but we wouldn't stand for that. The old man locked 'em up and put the key in his pocket. There was hot words and a lovely flow of Spanish cuss words. No coffee-colored, tin-plated sundowner of a Mexican he-general was going to get gay with your pockets while you was on the point o' death. He might ha' swiped your watch."

Stannard grinned with enjoyment as he asked:

"Did this hot tamale leave any address?"

"No. But he knows who you are and where you live. He sort of suspects you of putting one over on him, Mr. Stannard. He didn't even seem grateful to you for prolongin' his teetotally worthless career in this vale of sorrows. I never see such a man."

"General Rodigro Miramar!" said the invalid. "Seems to me I have heard of him. One of the main guys in Huerta's cabinet, a minister of something or other. Well, I don't want his precious bundle."

The cook scowled ferociously. It was to be inferred that he had found a pet aversion in the shipwrecked statesman from the land of revolutionary turmoil.

"A Jonah, you can gamble on it," was his bitter comment. "While he was here, I scalded my wrist and lost four dollars on a bet with one of them unsanctified Lewes pilots. Speaking of pilots, here comes your nurse, Miss Rushton."

"What is the connection there?" queried Stannard.

"S-ss-h, don't ask her. It's really none of my business."

Dave hastily withdrew, as though in fear of a scolding, and Fred Stannard awaited, with slightly impatient curiosity, the entrance of the nurse. Of course, to make the episode dramatically complete, she ought to be young and

charming, and it was his business to fall in love with her. Plenty of color so far, thought he—a dangerous illness in a life-saving station, after plunging into the wintry surf to salvage an exotic gentleman with an evil temper and a mysterious bundle. There should be a woman somewhere in the story, and, according to the best traditions of Sunday edition feature stuff, the hero played it according to Hoyle by losing his heart to his trained nurse. As a newspaper man, Stannard was nothing if not consistent.

His first sight of Miss Emily Rushton convinced him that his adventure was not destined to have this kind of a finish. No sentimental climax for him! His own age was twenty-five, and he took her to be at least ten years older, a gentle, brown-eyed woman of a slight figure, whom one would be unlikely to notice in a crowd. Stannard smiled and mischievously inquired:

"Speaking of pilots, Miss Rushton, how about it? What is the answer?"

She blushed like a girl, taken all unawares, and the observant reporter decided that in her spotless white uniform and wisp of a cap she was rather pleasant to look at. Her professional instinct was uppermost, however, and she took hold of his wrist and laid a hand on his brow before she said:

"So you are normal again. I am so thankful. And you have been talking with that kind-hearted old gossip of a cook! I warned him that you must be kept quiet. Your broth is ready, and then you are to sleep and rest."

"Yes, ma'am, I promise to be a model convalescent if you will tell me why is a pilot."

"You must not say another word," she commanded, with the most dignified firmness.

Stannard lazily watched her moving to and fro, her tread quiet and quick. He admired efficiency. Most people muddled their lives for lack of it. The most plentiful tragedies, as his daily work had brought him into contact with men and women, were those of the unprepared. It was part of his creed that there was always room for those who were right on the job. The thorough competency of the nurse soothed him and banished worry. He drowsed the day away, waking now and then to tease her just to see that lovely color come into her cheek. Time had no meaning for him. He was so weak that to lie in bed and gaze out at the sand and sea and sky was all the occupation he desired.

Several days later, when he had begun to clamor for real food that a man could set his teeth into, there came to see him a large and hardy man with a red mustache and a gruff voice.

"Dan Quillman, the pickled walrus!" cried Stannard. "I was afraid you had passed me up as a shad-bellied bean pole, who couldn't stand a little rough weather."

"Shucks! You were a good game lad," replied the pilot. "The only thing I really had against you was fishing out that Mexican son of a dogfish. I meant to call in before now, but I was off in the pilot steamer waiting my turn for a ship, and I've just come in from taking out a big Henderson boat, grain-laden, and she drew twenty-seven feet aft. Well, son, how do you like your hospital?"

"It couldn't be better. I am under tremendous obligations to the crew of the station. I must have been all kinds of a nuisance."

"Forget it. Their hearts are in the right place. They are good boys. Most of them were raised with me in Lewes. And how about the nurse? Treat you right?"

Mr. Dan Quillman wore an expression of self-consciousness, almost timidity, for all his brawn and grimness. Stannard studied him critically. He was dressed with exceeding care

and neatness. Delaware pilots were a prosperous clan, and it was obvious that Quillman had not patronized cheap outfitters. A flower was pinned to his coat. The reporter waved a hand toward the window as he answered:

"You will find Miss Rushton on the beach, first turning to the left. I have guessed the answer. Go to it!"

The pilot crossed the floor to satisfy his own eyes that she was near and visible. Then he lingered in the room, too much of a gentleman to cut his visit short, but his demeanor was absent-minded, and his interest wandered. Stannard mercifully refused to converse with him.

"I may as well steam on my way, then, if you have to be so dumb and unsociable," said the pilot. "I'll drop in again."

"Yes, do. I am getting well so fast that I won't need a nurse much longer. So be up and doing."

Mr. Quillman vanished forthwith, and the cook sidled in to confide:

"He fetched her a bunch of bananas, and a chunk of pink coral, and a panama hat off a South American tramp that he took up the bay last week."

"An eligible party, I should call him," said Stannard.

"He owns two houses in Lewes, and money in the bank, and a squarer man never trod a deck. The station is already figurin' on a wedding present. We're terribly excited."

"So am I, Dave. Both very efficient persons. They ought to thank the gentleman from Mexico. That reminds me that I feel just about strong enough to wonder what is in that packet so carefully wrapped in rubber cloth. Rummage in my ulster, will you, and let's have a look at it. There may be an address or something."

"I've speculated about it heaps," returned the cook, with boyish eagerness. "Wait till I get the key of the locker from the old man. He is just coming ashore from boat drill."

Dave presently returned to the room with a rubber sponge bag containing what felt like a number of folded documents. Stannard conjectured that General Miramar had bethought himself of trying to protect them when the steamer went ashore, thrusting them into the sponge bag and wrapping it with twine, and then putting the package into a small traveling bag which he had fastened to his wrist by means of a cord.

"Papers of some sort, not jewels," observed Stannard, as he held the sea-stained parcel. "Paper money, possibly. I wonder how much water soaked through. This rubber cloth is all cracked and stuck together. It dried out that way. We ought to peel it off, Dave, and put the papers in a big envelope. They couldn't be sent anywhere in that shape."

"And maybe there'll be no harm in takin' a squint. I'm anxious to get a line on this Mexican general, Mr. Stannard. It's my private opinion that he is seven kinds of a hellion."

"We ought not to poke into his private affairs, Dave, old man, but there is merit in your suggestion. I speak as a working newspaper man."

As it turned out, there was no need for deliberate examination of the private affairs of General Rodigro Miramar. The information fairly stared Stannard in the face as he carefully removed the damaged wrapping. The documents were stained and the salt water had smeared the ink, but the writing was still legible. Stannard laid them upon his bed one by one in order to be certain that they did not adhere to each other. There were in all a dozen of them, mostly written in Spanish, several, however, with memoranda in English appended. In form they were letters, credentials, tabulations of figures.

Stannard's eyes glistened as he perceived the signature of Victoriano Huerta, dictator in fact, president in name, the man who had made a jest of the efforts of United States diplomacy to pull him down. The signature was scrawled at the bottom of six separate documents.

Stannard was not a Spanish scholar, but he was a very shrewd reporter. It was quite obvious to him, after a brief study, that he had stumbled upon something so big that he did not know what to do with it. General Rodigro Miramar had been intrusted with a secret mission to certain men of wealth and power in the United States and Europe. He carried ceredentials addressed to them. Other papers contained the details of what they were to receive in return for certain assistance of a financial and political nature.

Stannard jumped at his conclusions. The names were enough. One was that of an American capitalist who had vast landed interests in Mexico. Another was at the head of a mining syndicate with headquarters in New York. A third was a former senator who had organized a company to develop certain oil fields in combination with an English group. There were other names with which Stannard was not so familiar, but he assumed that they were linked together in the same community of interests. He no longer felt scruples at investigating the personal and private affairs of General Rodigro Miramar. If his surmises were correct, here was something which concerned the welfare of the people of the United States. There was no doubt in his mind that the clamor for armed intervention in Mexican affairs, the insistent demand that Huerta be recognized as the constitutional president, had been largely instigated by just such interests as the names in these documents stood for. They cared not a rap for the lives of American soldiers and sailors, it was a matter of indifference to them whether or not the Mexican rebels had a cause worth fighting for. They believed that under the iron-handed dominion of such a man as Huerta foreign property in ranches and mines and oil wells and railroads would be secure.

Stannard was cynical enough to comprehend that much of the newspaper opinion had been swayed by these very interests. In Mexico it was a death struggle between the class and the mass. In the United States the cleavage had followed the same line. And it was plausible to reason that Huerta might turn to wealthy sympathizers in the United States, who would supply his war chest with funds, agitate for armed intervention to restore order, and work for his recognition by the American government. Stannard sat in silence, absorbed with his thoughts, until the cook mildly protested:

"Sort of throwed you in a trance, didn't it? Can you read it?"

"I am busy guessing, Dave. Does anybody here know Spanish? I can trust men like your crowd. They can't be bought. It's the men with millions that are ready to sell out themselves and their country."

"I don't know much about millionaires and their ways, Mr. Stannard, but Dan Quillman can sling the Spanish in a smatterin' sort of style. At least, he was in the Spanish-American trade as mate and master, more or less, before he went to pilotin'."

"And I can trust Dan," said the reporter.

"Nothing surer than that. And I can keep a secret, for all my tongue is hung in the middle."

"It *is* a secret, Dave," was the grave reply. "This General Miramar was on his way to confer with certain persons who worship dollars, and to Hades with principles. They believe that people, industries, land, are theirs to exploit, and that governments exist for their

exclusive benefit. Here at home we have put a crimp in them of late, and they are yearning for the chance to clean up in Mexico. This Miramar had to have credentials to do business, do you see? They were dangerous documents to carry, but nothing doing without them. Shipwreck upset his game, but he tried to get the documents ashore. No wonder he was having fits. Unless he has the papers, authorizing him to act for Huerta, all he can do is sit around and bite his nails. Maybe he has gone back to Mexico."

"Now won't Dan be sorry he didn't kick the pants off him," commented the cook. "He ought to be strung up by the thumbs."

At this moment the nurse entered the room, her stalwart suitor filling the doorway. There were signs, which a blind man could have read, to indicate that there had been a swift and successful courtship. The pilot was not an easy man to resist. As uncommonly efficient persons, it was fair to assume that they knew their own minds; and were opposed to wasting time. Stannard smiled at them and thought of one of those neat white houses in Lewes with trees and a garden. Miss Emily Rushton had found a man strong and true, and a very pleasant haven.

"Congratulations!" exclaimed the reporter. "I saw the purpose in your eye, Mr. Daniel Quillman. The profession of nursing is extra hazardous, particularly in a life-saving station frequented by Delaware pilots."

"I have not allowed it to interfere with your case," asserted she. "And I am to go back to Philadelphia to-morrow, so the doctor tells me."

"And I shall go with you," boomed the pilot. "No more cases for yours. You pick out a trousseau, and back we steer for Lewes and the parson."

The impetuous Dan looked at the papers scattered about the bed, and his red mustache bristled.

"Spanish, uh? That Mexican blusterer? Anything interesting?"

"Look them over, if you please," replied Stannard. "Mum's the word for all hands. The future Mrs. Quillman is the soul of discretion."

The pilot read a phrase here and there, and glowered in a manner to terrify any one except Miss Emily Rushton. What he was able to translate confirmed all that Stannard had guessed. To the straightforward mind of Dan Quillman, ballasted with rugged virtues, there was something singularly abhorrent in these disclosures. He and his breed of men fought in the open. This was a conspiracy which dealt its blows in the dark.

"A fine bunch of pirates!" said he. "Hold on. That's not fair. I apologize to Captain Kidd. He landed at Lewes once to buy provisions, and he paid for them. No use trying to read the rest of this truck. You have the goods, Stannard. What are you going to do with them?"

"I don't know," slowly answered the reporter. "One thing is sure. I can't afford to waste any more time getting well. How about it, Miss Rushton? When can I go back to Philadelphia?"

"In a very few days, Mr. Stannard. You have been gaining strength so fast in this sea air, and the life-saving crew has been so kind in letting you stay, that there seemed no hurry."

"A few days?" he ruefully echoed. "Then please send a wire for me to the managing editor of the *Tribune*, asking him to come down here this afternoon—urgent business. He knows I wouldn't spring a fool's errand on him. You might tip him off that I am in my right mind again."

"He came down twice while you were so very ill," said the nurse. "And my instructions were to send him a daily report of your condition."

"About these documents," heavily exclaimed the pilot. "You have let us into the game, and we're ready to stand by. Take a bit of advice from me, son. Play your hand carefully. If you need friends, throw up a rocket. You've accidentally got hold of a mighty explosive cargo of information. General Miramar has a notion in the back of his head that you are holding out on him. At least one man has been hanging about Lewes and rambling on the beach, who said he was set ashore sick from an outbound steamer. But he hasn't the cut of a sailor to me, and there's nothing wrong with his health. He may be keeping an eye on you."

"A spy? Bully good stuff," grinned Stannard.

"Not if this Miramar savvies that you really pinched his bunch of papers," retorted Quillman. "If it meant snuffing out your lights to get them back again, and keep you quiet, he'd hesitate about a minute. He is a bad Mexican, and there are big stakes on the table. Any gent that does confidential business for Huerta is no tame pussy cat, you can bet a blue chip on that."

"This conversation is too exciting for my patient. It sounds like a dime novel," objected the nurse.

"Then you will stroll outside with me, Miss Emily Rushton," quoth the enamored pilot. "I have one million and seventeen things to say to you before I lay a course for Lewes."

Mr. Willis Croyden, the managing editor, arrived by the next train from Philadelphia. Meanwhile Stannard had pored over the documents, made notes, recalled what he knew concerning the interests implicated, and was ready to present the matter in compact, logical fashion. He had the utmost confidence in Willis Croyden's integrity and judgment. His reputation, made in New York, had caused the owner of the *Tribune* property to offer him a contract for a salary fabulous in Philadelphia journalism. Stannard steadied himself for the interview, for he foresaw difficulties. He spoke with his leisurely drawl as he said in greeting:

"You have been more than good to me, Mr. Croyden, and this is my first chance to thank you."

"Inasmuch as I came near murdering you by sending you on the assignment, I have done very little to make amends," was the reply. "Now don't feel in a fret to return to work. Your salary goes on just the same."

"I won't know what to do with it. And I don't want to loaf any longer than it can be helped. What did you think of my telegram, asking you to hustle down here?"

"I thought I had better come. What have you turned up? The light of battle is in your eye, Stannard. And you are unnaturally calm."

The reporter ticked the names off on his fingers as he answered:

"Allen V. Hough, the Westheim Brothers, the Maxwell Syndicate, old Senator Charlton S. Stout, not to mention others. Do they suggest anything to you? Big names, aren't they?"

The strongly lined face of the managing editor expressed quick, calculating intelligence. His knowledge of men, motives, events was much greater than appeared in the columns of the *Tribune*.

"Large names in the game of financial strategy and exploitation," said he, after a significant pause. "Coupled together, as you reel them off, I should say that they meant Mexico."

"I knew you'd get me," smiled Stannard. "And what have these gentlemen to do with Mexico?"

"A catechism, is it? Leading up to your climax?" amiably interrogated Willis Croyden. "Well, I suppose I must humor an invalid. As one who has occasional glimpses behind the scenes, and is aware that the most vital stories are those unpublished for lack of proof, I reply that these particular mag-

nates and manipulators are not in Mexico for their health."

"They are tied up with Huerta in the hope of filling their own pockets and trying to drag us into a bloody war, and I have the evidence to show them up," announced Stannard, shoving a hand under his pillow. "Oh, it is all here, what they are to give, and what they are to get in the way of concessions and so on, looted from the Mexican people."

"You have what?" gasped Croyden. "Is this more delirium? When have you had a chance to dig up stuff like this?"

"Oh, I was a little life-saving crew of one. General Rodigro Miramar was my prize, and I kept his luggage. What do you know about him?"

"That he was in Washington last week. He figured in the downfall and death of Madero. Huerta made him minister of the interior."

"Then I am not raving, Mr. Croyden. Now please glance over these papers and my explanatory notes. Of course, there is a question of ethics. That is up to you. But in our business the end sometimes justifies the means. I'm not in the habit of stealing a man's private papers, but this is a public matter. It sounds like treason to me when wealthy men will plot against their own government."

Willis Croyden moved his chair to a small table near a window, thoughtfully adjusted his glasses, and was silent while he scanned the documents one by one. For almost an hour he sat absorbed, and Stannard was forgotten. The nurse flitted in and out, wearing a kind of mild radiance like an afterglow of the parting with her headstrong lover of a pilot. Stannard wondered why the managing editor should sit so long when the salient facts were obvious. To make it more puzzling, Willis Croyden had ceased to study the documents, and was gazing out at the sea as though brooding over some problem peculiarly his own. At length he turned to say:

"It is all there, Stannard. You have the whole crowd dead to rights. A complete translation would make the details easier to run out, but I am satisfied that the case is proven right up to the hilt."

"No doubt of that in my mind, sir. Now what shall we do with it? I can see those documents spread all over the front page of the *Tribune,* with photographs of Huerta's rich American allies. Publication is justifiable, is it not? I can't seem to see myself in the act of handing these papers back to General Rodigro Miramar and meekly accepting a reward."

"Publication is justifiable," agreed the managing editor, who hesitated before he added: "I have no qualms on that score. We have to fight the devil with fire, you know. I hardly think that you are in honor bound to respect the ownership of General Miramar in this information. But——"

Croyden was frowning and stroking his chin with nervous fingers. Stannard appeared anxious. He suspected indecision, and this was most unlike the managing editor when confronted with important news.

"But I shall have to show these documents to the owner of the *Tribune* before making use of them," Croyden went on to say. "An exposure of men and interests so influential as these would——"

"You will have to obtain the consent of J. R. Estabrook?" cried Stannard, and the drawl was gone from his voice. "That hadn't occurred to me. I thought the *Tribune* property was a sort of plaything of his. The office takes that view, As for directing its policy, you are regarded as the Big Noise. Mr. Estabrook has so many other irons in the fire, and so much loose coin, that it——"

"So many other irons in the fire," explained Willis Croyden, with per-

ceptible reluctance. "There are reasons why I must get his opinion of this matter."

"Ah, I see," said Stannard, and in his black eyes gleamed the worldly, cynical criticism of life that is apt to color the attitude of the experienced reporter. Croyden was uncommonly frank with him. It was a delicate situation. On the tip of Stannard's tongue were awkward questions. But it was for him to leave them unsaid. He must read between the lines and draw his own conclusions.

"Ah, I see," he repeated. "The owner must be consulted, of course. How stupid of me, Mr. Croyden!"

"If you will turn the documents over to me, Stannard, I will take the proposition up with Mr. Estabrook to-morrow morning."

The reporter took his turn at gazing out at the sea. He wished that he were in more vigorous condition to meet this problem. His head ached and his hands were heavy with lassitude. It was to be a fight to a finish, however, and, holding himself together with an effort, he said:

"If Mr. Estabrook should decide against publishing this story, if he should think best to suppress these documents, for reasons of his own, what then?"

"I shall have to be guided by his decision," replied the managing editor, wincing as he spoke. Willis Croyden had been forced to confess that he was not his own man, and the confession hurt him to the soul. He was free as long as his policies did not conflict with the private interests and alliances of the capitalist who employed him. The realization had not hitherto confronted him in such brutally direct form as this. Thus it was, he knew, with other men, but he had mistakenly believed himself to be his own master. And he had been thrust upon the horns of this hateful dilemma by one of his own reporters. There was too much fineness in him to feel anger toward Stannard. It was merely happening as circumstances decreed.

"Then if you are not sure that the owner of the *Tribune* will wish you to publish this exposure," said Stannard, in a low voice, "may I have your promise that the documents will be returned to me? What I mean is, that if Mr. Estabrook wants to suppress them, put them out of the way, for any reason, you will explain to him that they belong in my possession, to do with as I may think best?"

"You mean that you would go to another newspaper with them?" quickly queried Croyden.

"Not unless the *Tribune* fires me. Loyalty is one of my weaknesses. Is it a bargain, Mr. Croyden? I get the stuff back if you don't use it?"

"I shall have to leave that to Mr. Estabrook," was the stubborn reiteration. "It is for him to say whether news shall be suppressed or not."

Stannard was genuinely grieved. He had hoped to hear the managing editor say that the *Tribune* could either print this exposure, or accept his resignation. Croyden's salary was reputed to be fifteen thousand a year. Every Friday afternoon Fred Stannard stood in line at the cashier's window and received an envelope containing fifty dollars. At this moment he would have refused to exchange positions and salaries with the managing editor. Chains were chains, no matter how gilded.

"I'm sorry," exclaimed the reporter. "You and I can't seem to get together on this deal. I can't let you have the Miramar documents. For reasons that look good to me, I shall keep them myself, for the present."

"I can't demand them, Stannard. You found them, you know. And this is the sort of argument that can't be pushed any further. I have no personal feeling against you, please un-

derstand that. It's a smashing big story——"

"Too big, Mr. Croyden? I suppose I am guilty of insubordination."

"I have no intention of punishing you, Stannard. Think it over. I shall see you in Philadelphia later in the week."

They shook hands, and Willis Croyden said farewell with a manner curiously gentle, as though the interview had been with a younger brother, whose high esteem he valued exceedingly, and which he felt to be tarnished. Stannard lay back in bed and closed his eyes. The nurse thought he was sleeping, but his brain was never so alert, and he was saying to himself:

"Croyden will think it his duty to tell J. R. Estabrook that I have this stuff, and that I refuse to turn it in. And so Estabrook is hooked up in one way or another with Allen V. Hough or the Westheim Brothers or the Maxwell Syndicate or that two-faced old goat, Senator Charlton S. Stout! This Mexican situation is so rotten that it smells. The press molds public opinion! A moldy idea, that! It's the moneyed interests behind the press. Poor old Willis Croyden! He can't help it. It's the way he has been trained to think. I shall now proceed to imitate a young man hurling a few projectiles into the enemy's works. All I need is some strategy and tactics. The ammunition wagon is full right up to the lid, and no J. R. Estabrook is going to be allowed to sit on the lid."

CHAPTER III.

That florid and sometimes disreputable journalist, Captain William Marmaduke Mannice, of the *Tribune* local staff, entertained the fallacy that the ladies thought him attractive. His dashing personality, his cosmopolitan experience of life, and his military flavor were, as he conceived it, peculiarly in his favor. There was, at this time, employed as a writer for the Woman's Page, a winsome slip of a girl named Nancy Veeder, who had bravely set forth to earn her living with the equipment of a naturally facile pen, and a diploma from Wellesley. It was a queer, disconcerting world in which she found herself, this great rackety building filled with men who tried to be courteous to her, and found precious little time for it. The *Tribune* was not "yellow," but under the management of Willis Croyden it was startlingly enterprising for Philadelphia, and little Miss Nancy Veeder was sent in quest of interviews which taxed her audacity to the limit and often made her falter.

It was a crowded life, and yet lonely for a girl whose home was a Spruce Street boarding house, and who had made almost no acquaintances outside the *Tribune* staff. Impressionable reporters asked her out to supper, usually immediately after pay day, when they were flush, and clever youngsters from the art department, who wore flowing black ties and called their lodgings studios, desired to introduce her to the real bohemia, but Nancy sweetly said nay to them all. Bachelor maid though she was, the traditions of convention were not to be easily overcome, and she had been brought up among gentlefolk who deemed the chaperon indispensable.

She had made an exception in the case of Fred Stannard, who had once found her weeping tears of weariness and discouragement on a red-hot, wilting summer day. She had forgotten to lock her office door, and he had blundered in, looking for some one else. It was during her first month on the *Tribune*, and he had comprehended. Heeding not her protestations, he had whisked her uptown to a roof-garden restaurant for luncheon, the nicest cold things to eat, an adorable salad, a pitcher of shandygaff. And in his

quiet, whimsical way he had amused and diverted her, somehow given her fresh courage and a better understanding of the game. His attitude was flawless. It was the sort of thing a man might do for his sister.

They had been friends since then in a casual way, an occasional chat in the office, dinner together now and then. She liked him better than any of the other men, and admired his talent. He rang true. If Fred Stannard ranked at the top in Nancy Veeder's estimation, then Captain William Marmaduke Mannice stood most emphatically at the bottom. She detested him. Although she had heard none of the stories of his past delinquencies, which floated about the shop, she was convinced that she had read him through and through. He was a cad and a rascal, whose fur coat covered a multitude of sins. Miss Nancy's opinions were positive in the extreme. Every time Mannice bowed and leered at her in passing, she longed to slap his face.

He was a newspaper man of brilliant attainments, for he said so himself, and yet he was remarkably obtuse. Nancy had a pretty face and the freshness of a flower. The sight of her pleased him, and it never occurred to him that she could regard him as an odious person almost old enough to be her father.

Shortly before Stannard returned from his enforced absence, Miss Nancy was sent out to find an English woman novelist who was visiting friends in an apartment hotel. The lady's fiction had made her more notorious than famous. The sporting editor of the *Tribune* had offered it, as his literary critique, that "she was the dame that put the rot in erotic." Nancy was requested to obtain her impressions of the American girl as a breezy feature for the Sunday sheet. Having glanced through one of the novels, Nancy conceived an intense dislike for the personality of the author as yet unknown to her, and the errand was so distasteful that she was in a prickly-tempered mood as she hastened to take a trolley at the Chestnut Street corner.

Presently Mr. Mannice entered the car and sought the vacant seat beside her. The first suggestion of spring was in the air, and he had doffed the lordly fur garment, retaining his grandeur, however, by means of a frock coat and top hat. As one whose eye was trained to follow the fashions, Nancy knew that the coat should have been a cutaway, and the roll of the hat brim was of a vintage a trifle archaic. Mingled with the aroma of a cocktail was a faint suggestion of moth balls. Reputable pawnbrokers are careful to see that no harm comes to the clothing of their customers. Nancy's nod was so chilly that Mr. Mannice may have regretted discarding the fur coat, but the genial warmth of his greeting was not in the least affected.

"And how is Miss Veeder to-day? Starting out on an assignment? Can I be of any assistance? I know everybody worth knowing."

"Thank you, Mr. Mannice, I am perfectly capable of managing my own affairs," snapped Miss Nancy. "I presume yours is a very important assignment, as usual."

The journalist raised his eyebrows at this, and the blandly protecting manner could not hide his irritation as he said with a shrug:

"That last remark of yours comes straight from Fred Stannard, marked with quotes. Been roasting me, has he? I'm not surprised. They all have their hammers out for a real newspaper man in the *Tribune* shop. And I've gone out of my way to show Stannard a few things."

Nancy giggled, which was tactless in the extreme. It was absurd to take the creature seriously. Mannice looked

vindictive. His hide was thick, but not wholly impenetrable.

"My impression is that you are under obligations to him for favors," said the girl. "You don't like him. Jealous of his youth and his ability and his future, are you? I saw it in your face just now. It's rather interesting to find it out."

"I am jealous because he has such a lovely little champion," rallied the lady-killer. "By the way, when is he expected back from his—er—his seaside vacation? A fine grand-stand performance, that. Oh, yes, he has ability. In the rôle of the fair-haired boy, Stannard has the *Tribune* hypnotized, all the way up to Willis Croyden."

There was malice in the words, venom in the intonations. Nancy Veeder could endure no more of it. The man's real motive had been unspoken, but she sensed it. Fred Stannard was a friend of hers. Therefore Mannice hated him. It was a very candid explanation to offer, even to herself, but the mental vision of Nancy was both clear and sensible. There was nothing whatever to indicate that Stannard had any notion of falling in love with her. Mannice was a fool and a middle-aged one at that. At forty they were apt to turn soft and make exhibitions of themselves. In order to get rid of her unwelcome companion, Nancy motioned the conductor to let her off at the next corner, where she proposed to wait for another car.

"Mr. Stannard is expected back in a day or so, and you will be glad of the chance, I'm sure, to say some of these sneering things to his face," was her parting thrust.

"Oh, I really haven't anything against the boy," airily replied Captain William Marmaduke Mannice, as he escorted her to the platform, and tarried to remove the top hat with an ornate flourish.

Thankful to be alone, Nancy presently resumed the interrupted journey. Her temper had not been improved, but she no longer dreaded interviewing the lady novelist, whose publishers boasted that her works had been banned by no fewer than fourteen public libraries. Nancy had survived a worse affliction. Life was largely a matter of comparisons, she reflected. Another block, and Mannice might have invited her to dine with him. With a contrite frown she said to herself:

"Perhaps I should not have been quite so horrid to him, but my nerves were all on edge. It was indiscreet to prod him about Fred Stannard. There was the ugliest look in his face, and he couldn't hide it. As an enemy, he would be a most unpleasant person. But the idea of slurring a poor sick man who almost died doing his duty! Beast!"

It did not occur to Mannice that she had fled the car to be rid of his obnoxious company. His animosity was all for Stannard. Nancy's spirited defense of him had made her look prettier than ever. It was a most diverting episode. Once more unruffled and good-natured, his self-esteem intact, Captain Mannice pursued his important way in the direction of city hall and the cafés near by, where certain of his political acquaintances were wont to discuss affairs of state.

A reform administration was endeavoring to give Philadelphia good government rather against its will. The rule of a corrupt machine had become a habit, and habits are not easily laid aside. The city accepted honesty in politics under protest. The *Tribune* reflected this attitude. During the campaign it had given the fusion reform ticket a half-hearted support. Now it lost no chance to point out the mistakes of the administration under the pretense of offering honest and helpful criticism. Many of the largest business interests were closely allied with the ring, which expected to regain its grip on the city

after one term of reform. The *Tribune* was not published for the owner's amusement. He had many irons in the fire.

The genial Mannice was on excellent terms with various councilmen, ward leaders, bigger bosses, even the supreme boss himself, of the party which was temporarily separated from its graft. From them he was able to obtain information which was, of course, expert and unbiased, inside stories of the way things were really going with the damned reformers in control of city hall. Now and then Mr. J. R. Estabrook condescended to make favorable mention of one of Mannice's snappy political stories, which were cleverly contrived to convey discredit where credit was due. And once or twice the owner had found it worth while to summon Mannice into his private office to hear his personal impressions of the manner in which certain matters were being handled.

On this particular afternoon, Mannice happened to pick up a rumor which he investigated with far more industry than he usually displayed. It had to do with a franchise measure for a subway extension, and there was more underground work to it than the public dreamed. The inference was that the machine hoped to be able to put one over on the administration. Instead of reporting to the city editor for instructions, Mannice arrived at the conclusion that his information might have sufficient interest for Mr. Estabrook to warrant an interview. The Estabrook estate was said to hold a large amount of traction securities. Any small favors which Mannice might be able to do the owner of the *Tribune* might protect him against the enmity of the city editor who had sworn to fire him if he faked another story or got drunk again.

Into the business office swaggered Captain William Marmaduke Mannice, and passed through to the small waiting room outside the door of the Estabrook sanctum. The stenographer asked him his errand, and curtly explained:

"Mr. Estabrook is engaged—in conference with the managing editor. Will you come in later?"

"I'll wait, thank you. It is an important matter, very important."

Mr. Mannice selected a chair and the latest edition of an afternoon paper. Presently he glanced at the closed door, but quickly resumed what appeared to be a studious perusal of the newspaper which he held higher so that it hid his face from the stenographer. The door was not quite soundproof, and the conference was earnest, not to say vehement. Under stress of excitement the voice of J. R. Estabrook was high-pitched, while that of Willis Croyden had a resonant quality at all times. The experienced Mannice had found that a good deal could be picked up by opportune listening. In New York he had served his time in the keyhole or transom school of journalism where the jimmy was mightier than the pen.

What caught his astute attention in the present instance was mention of the name of Stannard. Mr. Estabrook was the speaker, and a heated adjective, never used in a complimentary sense, led Mannice to believe that the absent reporter had become unpopular with the owner of the *Tribune*. Stannard, the office pet, in bad with the big boss? Here was a scandal worth prying into. An errand called the stenographer into the advertising manager's room. Mannice moved nearer the closed door. A moment later the knob turned, and he dodged back to his chair in time to see the managing editor half open the door, then turn and stand on the threshold to say something more. Mannice had a glimpse of his face,

which was set and white. His voice shook a trifle as he said:

"There was no way, no honorable way, Mr. Estabrook, by which I could compel Stannard to turn those documents over to me."

"Why didn't you string him along by promising to publish them?" angrily exclaimed the other. "You bungled it, Croyden. Send him down to me as soon as he comes back from the beach."

The managing editor waited a moment in silence. His back was toward Mannice, whose mind worked rapidly. It was poor business for him to be caught eavesdropping in a situation which impressed him as being very much out of the ordinary routine. The exit of Captain Mannice was instantaneous and without noise. He would return a little later for his interview with Mr. Estabrook. From a window of the café across the street he waited until the managing editor came out through the business office and turned into the next entrance of the building to take an elevator to his own department. No more than five minutes later the youthful-looking owner of the property dashed out and jumped into his motor which was waiting in a side street.

Mannice sauntered over, and inquired of the stenographer: "Is he coming back this afternoon? What's his hurry? Who turned in the alarm?"

"Mr. Estabrook left no word, but I do not expect him back to-day. It is just as well that you did not wait to catch him. He was not in his most amiable mood."

"Storm signals set? Thank you. I never knew that Mr. Croyden affected him that way."

"Who said anything about Mr. Croyden?" was the sharp reply.

"You told me they were in conference," pleasantly answered Mannice. "Suggesting that I mind my own business, are you? Good afternoon!"

He went upstairs to the local room and wrote a half column of political gossip which carefully avoided mention of the subway extension franchise. For an evening assignment he was told to cover the hotels and run down distinguished guests who might be worth a paragraph or so. This was an agreeable task. One could loaf in the lobbies and make the acquaintance of convivial strangers who were willing to buy. And it gave the ladies a chance to admire the presence of Captain Mannice. If a distinguished guest proved reluctant to talk for publication, nothing was easier than inventing the things which he ought to say, deftly steering clear of any cause for offense, and a "comeback."

The gallant journalist tarried first for a frugal supper in a downtown beanery where they gave bread with two fishballs. His financial stress was acute, and he had been unable to float a loan in the local room, but the fur coat was still held in reserve against a crisis. He was not in the habit of pawning it before April. Fortune favors the brave, and when he strolled into the third hotel of the evening round he encountered a life-insurance agent named Beresford, who hailed him joyously.

"Good old Bill! The very man! Have a cigar? What's your hurry? Come and join us."

"What's the party?" casually asked Mannice. One was so apt to run into people to whom he owed money that caution was proper.

"Only two of us," said Beresford, dragging him rapidly toward a door whose wicker screens swung both ways. "I bumped into him here at dinner—great story in him for you—but, say, I'm not in his class as a sincere sport. He has sprained a finger crooking it at the waiter."

"I should like to welcome him to our

village. An old friend of yours, Beresford?" thirstily murmured Mannice.

"The surest thing you know, Bill. I met him two years ago, in Mexico City, and he certainly was good to me. You may have heard of him—General Miramar. He speaks English and drinks in all languages."

"General Miramar? I'm not familiar with his record, but he qualifies, Beresford, my boy. Is he cast for a part in the revolution?"

"Ask Huerta. This General Rodigro Miramar helps him run the government."

"He may loosen up and give me an inside story," said the journalist.

There was nothing in the aspect of the swarthy, thickset gentleman at the table in a corner of the room to indicate that his potations had tended to "loosen him up." He sat erect, a dignified figure in evening clothes, sipping a glass of champagne, smoking a brown-paper cigarette, surveying the men at the other tables with affable interest. At the approach of Beresford and his friend, the general rose to his feet and bowed in a manner punctiliously courteous. He swayed a trifle, but his eye was unclouded and his utterance smoothly phrased as he said:

"Ah, it is a pleasure to meet a comrade of my dear friend Beresford. Captain Mannice, is it? And of the American army?"

"Formerly in the volunteer service, the Spanish war," answered Beresford as they sat down, while the general nodded at a waiter, who fled for another cold quart.

"I, too, have seen some fighting," chuckled Miramar, twisting an end of his black mustache. His upper lip lifted in a smile that had a suggestion of cruelty. "We shall tell stories to each other, we two veterans, eh, Captain Mannice?"

"Tell him how you got that scar on your chin, Bill," boisterously cried Beresford, in whom the fizzy wine had awakened a vast admiration for valor.

Mannice tried modest evasion. He was by no means a fool, and a brief appraisal of General Rodigro Miramar had convinced him that here was a man of penetrating intelligence who was not to be bluffed by empty words. Beresford, however, was noisy and insistent, the general flatteringly attentive. With a gesture of protest, Mannice explained:

"The Spanish war is such an old story! In the fighting outside of Santiago I was lucky enough to get to the front with my company of the Twentieth New York Infantry. We helped storm El Caney, where the enemy made a stubborn defense. The odd part of my experience was that a Spanish major and I singled each other out and fought a duel with swords while the scrimmage was going on all around us. As a rule, the officer's sword is a perfectly useless weapon, as you know, general."

"Not always in Mexico," politely murmured Miramar, "but I comprehend, Captain Mannice. Please tell us more."

"We went at it like a couple of butchers," cried Mannice, warming up to his narrative. "Our revolvers were empty, and there was no chance to reload. He drew first blood, giving me a wipe on the chin that laid it open to the bone. I was dazed for a minute; it was almost a knock-out, but I managed to dodge as he ran in close with the point aimed at my chest. He left his guard wide open, do you see, and before he could recover I whipped my sword around and drove it through his neck. He dropped in his tracks, dead as a mackerel, a fine-looking man who had seen much service. I learned who he was from prisoners of his own command."

General Miramar rested his elbows

upon the table, and placed his finger tips together. He appeared to be reflecting. It was to be gathered that he was much impressed. A flicker of amusement crossed his heavy features, but it was too subtle for the others to perceive. He had often found it expedient to conceal his thoughts. It was a rather curious coincidence that he should happen to have been the Mexican military attaché at the battle of Santiago, detailed by the war department of President Diaz. In the attack on El Caney he had stood with Chaffee and Lawton through the fierce artillery action, and had watched every detail of the final infantry assault. There had been no Twentieth New York regiment engaged, and General Miramar, whose memory was retentive, felt positive that such a volunteer organization had been nowhere among the American forces disembarked for the campaign. Probably the gallant Captain Mannice had proceeded as far as Tampa or Chickamauga, spending all his service in a mobilization camp.

"A thrilling deed, my dear captain," was the smiling comment of the Mexican diplomat. "Such a scar is more honorable than medals. It is a loss to the army that you no more lead your company. There is some talk of war with my country. I hope not. If so, you will please be so good as to stay at home. Do me the favor. It might be my sad misfortune to cross swords with you."

Mannice swallowed the flattery along with another glass of the sparkling stuff. He had told the story so often that to him it had almost ceased to be legendary. It would have disconcerted him to know that General Miramar had taken his measure.

"The captain is a newspaper man these days," said Beresford, who showed symptoms of drowsiness.

"As brilliant with the pen as with the sword, I have no doubt," observed the Mexican.

"They think so when he gets after 'em. How about it, Bill? What are you going to give us in to-morrow's *Tribune?*"

General Miramar moved in his chair. His eyes narrowed and were intently scrutinizing Mannice as he quickly spoke up:

"The *Tribune,* of Philadelphia? It is a great newspaper, so I have been told, and friendly to the existing government of my own country. It employs the most talented of journalists, of this I am certain."

Mannice laughed and acknowledged the compliment with a bow as he easily replied:

"It is a live newspaper in a slow town. New York is more my game."

"You have the fondness for the metropolitan atmosphere, captain? I should think so. You have seen the world, no doubt. You are the live wire, as they say."

"They don't make 'em any wiser, general. Take it from me," thickly muttered Beresford, who displayed an inclination to slide off his chair and vanish beneath the table. The Mexican gentleman paid no more heed to the luckless Beresford, but moved a trifle nearer Mannice, as though there might be a reason for confidential conversation.

"Poor old Beresford will be asleep in another minute," laughed Mannice. "He can't carry much of a cargo."

"He will be more comfortable in a bed," suggested the other. "It is a pity to send him home. I will have a room in the hotel placed at his disposal for to-night. He shall be my guest. Is it a good idea?"

"Excellent. Here, Beresford, old chap! Brace up! Time to hit the hay."

"Certainly, Bill. Get me a cab? Shee you 'morrow, general."

The thoughtful Miramar escorted Beresford to the elevator, and left him in charge of a bell hop, who promised to see that he retired in good order. Returning to join Captain Mannice, it was to be noted that the swarthy statesman ordered nothing more to drink. Mannice concealed his disappointment, but it pleased his vanity to know that the general cared to sit longer with him. The inward opinion of the distinguished foreigner would have been less pleasing to the journalist. Miramar knew the type. He had seen much of adventurers in Mexico. He had discovered this braggart to be a liar, and he was quite sure that he was also a blackguard who had discarded such excess baggage as conscientious scruples. One could go straight to the point with a man like this Mannice. It was merely a question of driving a bargain. And so he was a member of the *Tribune* staff!

"It is a satisfactory paper to work for, I presume?" said Miramar. "The emoluments are first class for one like yourself."

"About one-third of what I am worth," bitterly returned Mannice. "And an office full of rank favoritism."

"Ah, I am surprised, captain. Tell me, if you please, is it in your work to see much of a young man of the name of Stannard, who is also a writer for the *Tribune* newspaper?"

"That false alarm! Not if I see him first. He gets all the big out-of-town assignments that ought to be turned over to me."

"You do not love him," smiled the general. "Now I am very strongly interested in the young man. I shall give you my confidence. Seldom do I make mistakes in those I meet. It is my opinion that this Stannard is a thief."

"The devil you say! I wouldn't go as far as that," cried Mannice, genuinely amazed. "And where did he cross your trail?"

"It was not told in the newspaper, my dear captain, for the reason that Stannard was too suddenly ill to write of it, how I came to the shore from the steamer which brought me from Vera Cruz. Nothing but my name was in the list of the passengers saved from that dreadful shipwreck. I tell you frankly there is gratitude in my soul for the young Stannard. It was told me that he was of assistance in taking me from the waves. But there were valuables which I was most careful to take with me from the ship. These were missing when I had come to my senses. Nor can I make myself believe that the sea took them from me and destroyed them."

"What makes you think that?" queried Mannice.

"There was a leather bag, a small one, captain. I searched the sand with greatest care. Above the mark of high water were the tracks of wheels, of the cart which had carried me and the others to the house of the life-savers of the government. Close to those tracks I picked up one piece of that small leather bag which was not leather. It was the piece with the handle and the lock attached which made it heavy enough so the wind, a great wind it was, had not blown it away."

"And your theory is, general, that Stannard may have found the bag and rifled it?"

"It is a supposition, captain. The men of the government station would have returned it back to me, without doubt. I offered much money for a reward. The bag was strongly tied to my wrist, you are to remember."

Mannice smoked and cogitated. He was glad that he had been given no more to drink. His wits were working nimbly. General Miramar desired to make use of him, this he had already surmised. What flashed into his mind,

however, as the most important phase of the situation was what he had heard of that interview between the owner and the managing editor of the *Tribune* during the afternoon of this same day. Stannard had been the bone of contention. It had been disclosed to Mannice that Stannard possessed certain documents which J. R. Estabrook was anxious to obtain by fair means or foul, and which Willis Croyden had failed to get from him.

For two weeks and more Stannard had been ill in a life-saving station in care of a trained nurse. How could he have laid hands on any documents in that time unless in some way they came from the wreck of the Paxton line steamer in which General Rodigro Miramar had been a passenger? Mannice was aware that Willis Croyden had made a hasty trip to the beach shortly before this stormy interview with J. R. Estabrook. It was then, probably, that he had bungled the matter of coaxing the documents, whatever they were, away from Stannard.

"Those valuables of yours, general?" ventured Mannice, after a long pause. "They were jewels, money—or possibly they were documents of some sort?"

Miramar grunted, and bared his teeth in a mirthless smile. This Captain Mannice was no fool. Suspicion was in the general's gaze as he said:

"You appear to know more than I had supposed. Or it is a guess you are marking? Possibly they were documents. One may speak of such things as valuables."

"And you want to find out whether Stannard has them or not?" slowly replied Mannice. "And if he has them, you want to get them back? Are these fair questions?"

"They are fair questions, captain. My answer to you is that I am willing to make you forget that the *Tribune* pays you only one-third of what you are worth if you can succeed."

Again Mannice resumed his tactics of watchful waiting. J. R. Estabrook was eager to lay hands on these documents. There were, then, two bidders. The winning game was to play one against the other and sell out to whichever man offered the most cash. However, this was not for General Miramar to know. He and Estabrook must be kept apart. But there could be no negotiations for Captain William Marmaduke Mannice until he should have possessed himself of the documents. He knew that Stannard had them, and General Miramar only conjectured it. Herein Mannice scored a point to his advantage.

"How much is there in it for me?" he briskly queried.

"Return them all—satisfy me that they are safe against any publication in a newspaper—and there will be given to you the amount of two thousand dollars."

"Two — two — thousand — dollars?" gasped Mannice, bowled over for the moment. Pulling himself together with an effort at jaunty indifference, he added:

"It ought to be worth more than that to you really, general. The risk of publication, you know—if I can prevent that——"

"I am not so easy to bluff," was the dry comment. "For *one* thousand dollars you would agreeably try to assassinate your grandmother. I take it upon myself to say, my gallant captain, that I know you quite well."

"Here's to success!" quoth the other, lifting an empty glass.

"A small bottle for a nightcap," smiled Miramar. "What do you say, captain? Young Stannard returns to the city soon?"

"This week, I understand. And where may I find you, General Miramar?"

"At the address of the hotel in Washington which I will give to you. I

have finished my business in Philadelphia sooner than it was expected. It was my purpose to inquire concerning this Stannard. This has been nicely arranged with you."

"All but the matter of expense money," smoothly suggested Mannice.

"Ah, the matter of expenses! Pardon me for overlooking it. Yes, there may be expenses that are of a legitimate kind. Two hundred dollars I will give to you now. A receipt, if you please. And you will make a proper accounting, if there is need of more."

"Thank you, general. I think you have picked a man who can deliver the goods."

CHAPTER IV.

Fred Stannard returned to the city eager to pick up his work in the office, but he was still a somewhat languid convalescent. After loafing through two days in his comfortable lodgings on Walnut Street he was fretting with impatience. One might as well drop in harness as be bored to death. The Tribune Building was only a few blocks distant, and at one o'clock in the afternoon, his customary hour for reporting for duty, he walked slowly thither, craving the air and the sunshine which had mended his health down at the beach.

The city editor welcomed him joyfully, and a dozen reporters rushed up to shake hands and scold him for coming down so soon. He was as thin as a rail, said they, but his color was better than before he went away, and he had left that alarming cough behind him.

"No use trying to send you back to idle a few days more, I presume," said the city editor.

"Not unless you resort to violence," laughed Stannard. "If you refuse to give me anything to do I shall sit around and devil the rest of the gang. I'm darned homesick for this old shop, that's all there is to it."

"Then sit in at the rewrite desk, Fred, and put some style and pep into some of this rotten copy. Take it easy, and when you're tired say so. Some of the stories you will have to handle may make you tired, but that's all in the day's business. Mr. Croyden was asking for you when he came in at noon."

"He was? That's kind of him. Mr. Estabrook hasn't been asking for me, has he?"

"Not to my knowledge. Are you afraid he may query your expense account? I should worry. All your bills have been O. K.'d, I happen to know."

Stannard said nothing more, but hung up his coat, sharpened three pencils, and sat down to examine a bunch of copy which had been held over for lack of space. Slashing, interlining, sputtering over the infernal verbosity of cub reporters just out of college, he was absorbed in his task until a jovial voice interrupted, and the hand of Captain William Marmaduke Mannice was outstretched in greeting.

"By Jove, Stannard, old man, you certainly have been mourned by your loving friends. I am more than delighted! I hope you won't mind, but I took the liberty of recommending you for a Carnegie medal. I know the real stuff in heroes when I see it."

"With the accent on the 'stuff,'" was the thankless reply. "Perhaps you really did miss me toward the tail end of the week."

"You have a brutal way of reminding a chap, but it's your peculiar brand of humor," graciously returned Mannice, fishing out a roll of bills and peeling off a ten-dollar note. "I think that squares us for the several small favors you have done me."

Stannard was staring at the money, his expression comically incredulous.

"Holy mackerel, William Marma-

duke!" he burst out. "What have they been doing to Philadelphia while I was gone? Have they closed all the gin mills and raided 'Pop' Flynn's roulette wheel in Ninth Street? Or have you been taking a correspondence course in thrift?"

"A gentleman pays his debts. There is nothing novel about that," was the easy answer. "Have supper with me, will you?"

"Perhaps. It depends on how I feel by six o'clock. New suit of clothes, I notice. Raise of salary?"

"In this madhouse? Never! How do you like the raiment? Doesn't the coat wrinkle a bit across the chest?"

"It's not easy to fit such a chesty man," drawled Stannard, standing up to give the clothes his critical attention. "The buttons should be moved an inch or so."

"Precisely. Now that suit of yours is just about right. It hangs a bit loose just now, of course, but——"

Here Mannice touched the front of Stannard's coat to indicate what he meant, and his fingers rested an instant upon the region of the inside pocket. Through the cloth there was to be felt something hard and flat, different from the usual accumulation of letters and clippings which litter a reporter's coat pockets. Mannice drew in his breath, and his questing fingers trembled. Stannard suspected nothing. This seemed like a warm scent. Could he be so careless as to carry those documents about with him?

"This suit of mine was made by a real tailor," observed Stannard. "I paid him for it."

"Quit your kidding," cried Mannice. "I'll look in about five, old man. Better let me blow you to a real feed. You are due for a celebration."

The city editor summoned him, and Stannard picked up a pencil, reflecting to himself that Mannice wasn't quite as bad as he was painted. Glancing up at the clock, he clapped a hand to his breast pocket and recalled his errand with the Fidelity Trust Company in the next block. There was plenty of time to go there before the closing hour of three. Unobserved, he left the office and presented himself to the manager of the safety-deposit department. The brief formality of renting a box dispatched, he tucked therein the packet of documents, received the key, and felt somewhat easier in his mind.

Until five o'clock he stuck to the rewrite desk. There was a heavy run of copy for a special real-estate edition, and he did not realize that he was overtaxing his strength until a dizzy spell gave warning. Mannice strolled in, and saw him doubled over the desk with his head in his arms.

"Oh, it's nothing. I'll be all right in a jiffy," protested Stannard. "There's no ventilation in this room, and I have been used to plenty of oxygen."

"Chop it, and go home!" was the sympathetic command. "Let me phone for a cab. I think I had better go along with you."

"If you don't mind, Mannice. We'll have to call that supper off. All I need is to lie down for a little while."

A friend in need was the kindly Captain Mannice. He refused to leave Stannard until the sufferer was in his room and comfortably stretched on the divan. It was Mannice who helped him out of his coat and carefully hung it over the back of a chair. Then the thoughtful friend bade him close his eyes, and across them he laid a towel wrung in cold water. Stannard growled at being fussed over, but the attentions were grateful, nevertheless. Having blindfolded him with the cold towel, Mannice took occasion to brush against the coat on the chair, and with magical deftness his fingers explored every pocket.

Unfortunately for his strategy, Stan-

nard had discovered an old notebook of his shortly after his visit to the Fidelity Trust Company. It contained some addresses and sundry ideas for Sunday special stories which he thought he might work up at home if he should not feel strong enough for the routine of the shop. He rammed the notebook into the pocket which had held the packet of documents. It was the notebook, therefore, which the disgusted Captain Mannice hurriedly withdrew and glanced at. He assumed that he had made a mistaken diagnosis in the first place. In one unspoken word he expressed his emotions:

"Stung!"

Poor Stannard lay with eyes closed. Mannice dipped the towel in cold water again, and tenderly replaced it, after which he took a chair which offered him a comprehensive survey of the room. From his perverted point of view Stannard had hung on to those documents because he proposed to use them for his own advantage, to drive some sort of a profitable bargain. Every man had his price. Stannard had been shadowed ever since he left Lewes, excepting during his brief turn at the rewrite desk when Mannice had thought him safely disposed of. The bogus sailorman who had incurred the hostile suspicion of Pilot Dan Quillman had reported to General Miramar that Stannard sent nothing out of Lewes by mail. The general had instructed him to follow Stannard to Philadelphia and there take his instructions from Captain Mannice.

"Now chase along and don't mind me," feebly chirruped Stannard from the divan. "You are a confoundedly decent old sport, Mannice, and I retract a few of the insults I have handed you from day to day."

The eyes of the captain were roving from desk to bookcase, from the rugs to the corner cupboard and the closet door. The room was worth a search at some other time. This could be readily undertaken while Stannard was absent. It was not a difficult problem.

"Sure there is nothing more I can do for you?" said he.

"Nothing, thank you. My landlady is a good old soul, and I am her favorite lodger. I shall be down at the shop to-morrow to grab off an outside assignment. No more desk work for the present."

With a solicitous farewell Mannice departed to seek a rathskellar, where he might both compose and stimulate his intellect. The afternoon had not been wasted. Stannard felt under obligations to him and had shown a more friendly spirit than ever before. With the right amount of tact and finesse it should be possible to ingratiate himself still further and disarm distrust.

Stannard felt much more vigorous next day, and ventured to the office so early that he waylaid Miss Nancy Veeder as she was entering the building. Glad and frank was the message he read in her face as he explained:

"I knew that yesterday was your day off, but I told the elevator boy to let me know if you happened to drop in. I wish I could have had you to play with at the beach."

"It wasn't play for you," said she. "You don't know how much I—we—the staff has missed you. I'm sure the *Tribune* lost circulation."

"The woman's page made up for it, I'll bet, Miss Veeder. What is it now—'Beauty Hints,' 'Frills of Fashion,' or 'Help for the Tired Housekeeper'?"

Nancy stamped her foot, and vivaciously returned:

"Worse than that, or those. I am doing the Beatrice Clare column—the heart-to-heart stuff, you know—advice to girls in love with the wrong man and wives whose husbands fail to understand them. The regular Beatrice Clare lost his job the other day for

punching the foreman of the composing room."

"Good for Sweeney, I mean Beatrice Clare!" replied Stannard. "For a lady of his position he looked as if he had a punch, and that foreman had it coming to him."

"Perfectly absurd, wasn't it?" rippled Nancy. "Mr. Sweeney did a beautiful Beatrice Clare column. The girls used to weep over it. And I've been told that he covered prize fights in Kensington when the sporting editor was shorthanded."

"They can't expect you to be as versatile as that," gravely observed Stannard. "I never did that sort of gush, but if I can lend a hand——"

"Oh, I am not complaining," she bravely flashed back. "I suppose it is really a promotion. Mr. Croyden told me that the business office thought more of the Beatrice Clare feature than of the editorial page."

"I don't doubt it. And have you been feeling well—standing the pace all right?" he anxiously asked her.

"Splendidly, and not many fits of the blues. But had you ought to be here, Mr. Stannard? I called up the city editor last evening to ask him about something, and he said you had almost collapsed at the rewrite desk."

"Merely a whirly feeling inside my head," he sheepishly admitted. "Mannice took me home, and stood by in great shape."

"Mannice took care of you!" cried Nancy, and her eyes glittered. "Why, that man hates you, and says horrid things behind your back! What was his motive yesterday? To borrow money again?"

"No, he paid back all he owed me. He's a shyster and a good deal of a sot, I grant you that, but there is a good streak in him."

"The yellowest kind of a streak," Nancy retorted. "That cynical manner of yours is all pretense, Fred Stannard. You are very easily imposed on. It isn't really safe to let you roam at large if William Marmaduke Mannice can convince you that he is a friend."

"Whew! I won't mention him again. Why all these fireworks? What is the provocation? Has he been talking to you? If so, I may not be able to land a Beatrice Clare punch, but I'll try my best."

"Never mind why I think so," declared Nancy, who had no desire to instigate a quarrel. "Feminine intuition is no dream. Read Beatrice Clare and be convinced. Her intuition solves the most baffling problems of the human heart. My, but you men are stupid in spots. I should think you could just *feel* Mannice's real nature. Anyhow, I have warned you and you scoff, as is the habit of the species."

"Dine with me to-night and see if we can't find something pleasanter to talk about," he coaxed. "It is too early for roof gardens, but we haven't tried that new French place in Fairmount Park, just far enough away from the madding crowd."

"But you might have another whirly feeling in your head, and I couldn't take as good care of you as your admirable chum, Captain Mannice."

"A whirly feeling in my heart, more likely," he gayly responded, "and no one else but you can cure it."

"Um-m, you must have brought that from the beach!" she demurely observed.

"Brought what?"

"Sand!"

Stannard blushed, and murmured that he was five minutes late. Miss Veeder looked at her watch, and displayed consternation. The editor of the woman's page was a stickler for punctuality. Stannard left her in an upper hall, and went toward the local room, halting at the mail box which was in a small alcove adjoining. In his

box he found a sealed envelope containing a typewritten slip which read:

Mr. Estabrook wishes to see Mr. Stannard at two o'clock to-day, without fail.

The slip had been initialed by the city editor, indicating that Stannard was relieved from other duty. There was no one else in the alcove, and he was screened from the sight of those in the local room. The gum on the flap of the envelope had adhered poorly so that it opened without tearing. Stannard replaced the slip in the envelope, wetted the flap, pressed it down, and put the message back in his mail box. He did not wish to betray the fact that he had received it. Hastily retreating, he met nobody in the hall, and descended the winding flights of stairs instead of going out by the elevator route. He was sparring for time in which to think the situation over. Reporting for duty had been a voluntary act. He had been urged to take a longer period of recuperation. If he did not choose to turn up in the local room for another day or two it was his own affair.

Excitement made his gait rapid as he left the building by a side exit and moved down Chestnut Street in the direction of the river front, nor did he pause before reaching a wharf, where he leaned against a piling. Here he was reasonably remote from office acquaintances. He could think of one reason only why the owner of the *Tribune* should have sent him the peremptory summons.

"I doped it correctly," soliloquized the reporter. "Croyden is so blindly loyal to the man that hires him that he had to tell him about those Miramar papers. And J. R. Estabrook will try to get them away from me. Of course he can threaten to turn me over to the district attorney for stealing them. Bluff number one. He'd be a lunatic to try that, for all the newspapers would get hold of the story. And he is playing to suppress it. He can offer me much money or a better job. Nothing doing there. He can put up a talk about firing me and having me blacklisted by the big papers in this town and New York and Chicago. And his word will be taken."

It occurred to the perplexed reporter that his difficulties would be vastly diminished if he should cease to have the documents in his own possession. The information which they contained was in the public interest, no doubt of that. He had a tenacious sense of loyalty which forbade making a bargain with some other newspaper than the *Tribune*. It was quixotic, perhaps, but loyalty is among the virtues of youth. He greatly desired that the documents should be of service, that the truth should be revealed. And logically his reflections led to the conclusion that these ugly and sinister revelations should be placed at the disposal of the government in Washington.

Having made up his mind to this, Stannard determined to go to Washington as soon as possible. He could take a night train and be away from Philadelphia only one day. No excuse was needed in the office. It would suffice to say that he had laid off for the sake of his health. And it seemed unhealthy to delay getting rid of the packet of papers. The business in Washington transacted, he would saunter into the Tribune Building, open his mail box, find the summons of J. R. Estabrook, and dutifully hasten downstairs to see that gentleman.

From the river front, Stannard walked as far as the Fidelity Trust Company, opened his safety-deposit box, and tucked the packet of papers in his pocket. It escaped his notice that he had been followed to the wharf by a man no longer roughly attired as a sailor. This person still kept him in sight, loitering in a doorway until the

reporter came out of the trust company's building, and then picking up the trail which led uptown and turned over to Walnut Street. The spy appeared to be an adept at this sort of work. He stayed a considerable distance in the rear, but singled Stannard's slender figure from the crowd with unerring vision.

The reporter went straight to his lodgings, intending to rest for an hour or two. He had no more than stretched upon the divan with a novel, an old pipe, and three pillows under his head when this seemed a poor scheme. The city editor might telephone the house, asking him to come down and see Mr. Estabrook who was not a patient waiter. Thereupon Stannard concluded to make himself hard to find. He might have taken an afternoon train for Washington, arriving there in the early evening, but this meant breaking the engagement for dinner with Nancy Veeder. Therefore he bethought himself of a quiet resort in West Philadelphia where he had occasionally played billiards. He handled a cue with uncommon skill, and had promised to give the manager of the place a chance to defeat him.

When he jumped on a street car the dapper man who was so keenly interested in his movements hailed a passing taxicab, which took the same route across one of the bridges of the Schuylkill. No sooner had Stannard swung himself off at the corner nearest the billiard rooms than the spy dismissed the taxi and casually sauntered past the place, swinging across the street to reconnoiter it. Presently he entered the door leading to the small bar and restaurant, and ordered a bottle of mineral water. From where he stood he saw the reporter in friendly converse with a ruddy German in a white jacket who was chalking a cue. This meeting appeared so harmless that the spy thought the moment opportune for a brief journey to the public telephone in the drug store near by.

He was so fortunate as to connect with Captain William Marmaduke Mannice, who was apt to be found not far from city hall at this hour of the afternoon.

"He has them with him," cautiously imparted the spy, after closing the door of the booth.

"Are you with him?" demanded the doughty journalist.

"Certainly I am. He ducked into the Fidelity Trust Company and passed through the bank into the back room. I know what's there—the safety department."

"Sure it wasn't to interview somebody?"

"It looks like a cinch to me. He didn't go back to the office at all—walked to his room, was in there twenty minutes, and then boarded a trolley out to a billiard joint in West Philadelphia. He's pushing the balls around with a fat Dutch party—seems to be an old pal of his."

"How long is he liable to stay there?" queried Mannice.

"Some time. They're joshing each other about hundred-point games, best two in three."

"Horn in, then, if you can, and scrape his acquaintance. Can you play billiards? Fine! He's up to something and keeping under cover, or he wouldn't be loafing out there with the city editor raising Hades to get track of him. How do you know he didn't leave the stuff at his room?"

"It's a hunch of mine that something's coming off, captain. But if you can manage it why not take a look at his room? Can you fake an excuse to get in?"

"Easy. The landlady knows I am a friend of his. All I have to say is that I left my cane there when I was playing nurse to him yesterday."

"Pretty raw for you if he suspects, isn't it?"

"What can he say?" laughed Mannice. "He can't put it up to me. He stole the stuff himself. Now get busy and meet me at six o'clock, you know where. If you can't leave him, phone me."

The spy returned to the German's place, and drifted into the billiard room. His manners were as quiet as his taste in dress. General Miramar had obtained him from a detective agency which rated him as a high-class man. On more than one occasion the Mexican embassy in Washington had employed him for special secret-service work. He readily adapted himself to his environment, and had perceived that Stannard was as much the gentleman as Mannice was the arrant bounder. Idling in a chair he watched the billiard match, making an approving comment now and then which drew a friendly smile from Stannard. At length the German was called into the kitchen by the sad tidings that the cook had deserted him. Ruefully he was compelled to place his cue in the rack and sally forth to an employment office.

"Come back to-night, Mr. Stannard," said he. "I will trim you, so help me. You are not working to-day, you tell me. The balls have broke bad for me this afternoon."

"Better luck next time, Mr. Schmeltz," carelessly replied the reporter. "Sorry I can't give you your revenge to-night, but I have to go to"—he caught himself, instinctively discreet, and finished—"I have to go out of town."

"Maybe the gentleman in the chair will take a hand if you have more time to kill," suggested Schmeltz.

In journalism one learned the habit of haphazard acquaintance, and Stannard had reasons for wishing to put an hour or so more out of the way. The quiet stranger accepted the invitation, and soon showed that he was a more expert player than Herr Schmeltz. This interested Stannard, and put him on his mettle. They chatted mostly about strokes and caroms and the wizards of the cue whom they had happened to see in tournament play.

"You know Dillon's billiard rooms in Washington, of course," said Stannard.

"Yes, indeed. Hoppe and Sutton are matched for three nights there this week I read in this morning's paper."

"The deuce they are!" blurted the reporter, carried away by the zest of the game. "I'll have to stay over to-morrow night if it takes a leg."

"You are going to Washington?"

"Possibly," hedged Stannard, although he could see no harm in the slip. "A reporter never knows where he will go next."

Shortly after this the stranger courteously excused himself, explaining that he had run out to West Philadelphia for a business interview with the purchasing agent of the University of Pennsylvania, and must take the five-o'clock express back to New York. They shook hands and exchanged cards at parting. Stannard hoped they might meet across a green table again. Left to himself, he knocked the balls around, and assiduously practiced fancy shots.

At six o'clock the spy met Captain Mannice and reported that Stannard was bound for Washington. It looked like a hot trail. Mannice agreed that there was something doing.

"It is not on business for the *Tribune*," reasoned he. "The office couldn't find him to give him any assignment. I was in his room on Walnut Street for half an hour. There was nothing there, or he outguessed me. Washington, eh? Is there a chance that he intends to return the stuff to General Miramar?"

"Not a chance in a thousand," asserted the spy. "This Stannard isn't

built that way. He has one of those things called a sense of duty."

"Foolish, in the newspaper game," scoffed Mannice. "The only duty I know is to root for number one."

"He will take a late train," said the other. "He has a date for dinner with that pretty little Veeder girl, in the park. I heard him fix it up."

The valorous captain displayed emotions, mostly tinged with green. His companion was amused, but concealed it. This Mannice had a streak of the ridiculous.

"Never mind that," snapped the journalist. "He will probably take a sleeper from the Broad Street station. No need of shadowing him until then. He means to pull it off in Washington, whatever it is."

"And I am to go in the same train, Captain Mannice?"

"No, I shall take charge, understand?"

The edict was uttered importantly, very importantly. The other man assented without argument, remembering the instructions of General Miramar.

"As a friend of Stannard I am the chap to get next to him," added Mannice. "You had better stay here in case he should double back in a hurry. If I need you in Washington, I'll wire."

At the hour appointed Stannard whisked Nancy away from her boarding house in a taxi, bidding the driver seek the river road through the park and take his time about it. She chided him as a spendthrift reporter for flinging his salary about in this lordly fashion, but he laughed and explained that the novel experience of being ahead of the *Tribune* cashier made him uncomfortable.

They found the newly built inn perched among the rocks, and voted it delightful. Roistering motorists had not yet discovered it, and the season was too early for crowded patronage. It was not too early, however, for the first spring madness to stir in Stannard's blood. It came to him as a disquieting revelation that nowhere in the world was there a girl so piquant and alluring as Nancy Veeder.

His thoughts turned to the romance of that masterful pilot, Dan Quillman, and the brown-eyed nurse. By now they were in that comfortable white house at Lewes, overlooking the breakwater and the sea beyond. Their love for each other was the real thing. It had shone in their faces. It was destiny that the twain should mate, dissimilar as they seemed in every way to be.

Nancy stole curious glances at his face, which reflected a kind of brooding tenderness. He appeared more boyish than usual, more as he ought to look at twenty-five. Until now it had disturbed her that the newspaper game seemed to be battering down his illusions, tending to make him a whimsical skeptic in his views of life.

"Aren't you going to eat any of this lovely, extravagant dinner?" demanded Nancy.

"Of course. Pardon me. I was in a sort of trance," he exclaimed, with a start. "I presume you often affect them that way."

"Some have nicer manners than others, and I'm awfully hungry. But I hate to disturb you. You don't have to talk to me."

"The trouble with daily newspaper work is that there is no home life in it," he announced, as though this threadbare statement were entirely new.

"Then why not be wedded to your career and make the best of it?" said she. "You ought not to complain, Fred Stannard. Look at you, three years out of college and the star man of the *Tribune*, shoved over the heads of most of the old-timers."

"They have been mighty good to me," he smiled, "but I was thinking of a theory, not a condition. I might want a home some time. How about you?

Are you getting over that lonesome feeling?"

"Is this leading up to a proposal?" sparkled Nancy.

"You might call it premonitory," he drawled. "It is a sort of introductory paragraph."

"It lacks terseness and accuracy. It could never pass the rewrite desk, I am sure. Speaking as Beatrice Clare, who prescribes for such cases, I should advise you not to trifle with the young lady's feelings. It is a grave mistake to awaken in her heart hopes which may never be realized."

"But you insist that a young man should be sure of his job before he asks the girl to trust her life to his keeping, don't you?" lightly queried Stannard.

"Beatrice Clare is a practical person. The job should be secure, by all means."

"Then I shall have to postpone action," he declared, more seriously.

"*You* worried about your position?" was her incredulous question. "Nonsense! You couldn't be pried away from the *Tribune*. Willis Croyden dotes on you."

"Nevertheless, things may happen," he darkly hinted. "I remind myself of the young man who lighted his cigarette in the powder magazine. He got away with it, but it put him in bad with his boss."

"Of course you won't tell me, Fred Stannard. Men do so love to be mysterious, especially with girls. It feeds their vanity, poor things. Heaven knows they need it."

"Thanks! Now let's talk shop. I want to know a lot more about your job, Miss Nancy Veeder."

They lingered long over the coffee, and wandered thence to the wide piazza. It was the first leisurely evening they had spent together. When Stannard thought to look at his watch he blinked with amazement. He had no more than time to reach the Broad Street station. No taxi was at hand, and they scurried to the nearest trolley line. Breathless they scrambled into a car, Stannard grievously protesting:

"But I can't take you home, and it seems perfectly rotten to desert you at the station at this hour of night."

"But I often have to poke around at all hours."

"Not if I can help it, Nancy. I will ask the transfer agent at the station for a trustworthy driver to take you the rest of the way in a cab."

"Then I insist on staying to see you off to Washington, O man of mystery! That is no more than fair."

Luck favored the flight by trolley, and they arrived with several minutes to spare. Stannard attended to the matter of the cab, which waited while Nancy went as far as the ticket gate. There was something in this ceremony of farewell which deeply moved Fred Stannard. He thought of his many journeys for the *Tribune* out of this same train shed when there had been none to wish him Godspeed. To have one you cared for linked by the farewell when you went away from her and by the welcome when you returned, ah, it began to seem as though he had caught a glimpse of the greatest thing in the world.

As he turned while hastening to the sleeping car, Nancy was waving her handkerchief.

When she passed out to the street, there brushed past her that detestable journalist of fortune, Captain William Marmaduke Mannice. In a violent hurry and scowling formidably, presumably because of some delay, he rushed to the row of ticket windows. He failed to see Nancy, and she thanked her stars. She halted to gaze after him, for no logical reason. On general principles, she suspected him. He tarried a moment before the same window at which Fred Stannard had bought his ticket for Washington, and

presently he fled to the same gate in the train shed.

This coincidence made Nancy uneasy, nothing tangible, merely that she disliked the idea of Fred Stannard traveling in the same train with Mannice, who hated him and masked his hatred. If only Fred had not made that singular reference to lighting cigarettes in a powder magazine! This had worried Nancy more than she permitted him to see.

With an impulse which her intuition prompted, she walked rapidly to the ticket window, and dared to ask the young man in charge:

"Pardon me, but do you happen to know Mr. Mannice, of the *Tribune* staff? A rather tall, imposing person, with a scar on his chin, wearing a tall hat, I fancy."

Nancy smiled as she spoke, and the lightning ticket artist, who had been made blasé by dealing with humanity in the herd, discovered that his heart was still susceptible.

"Yes, I know him," was the amiable reply. "I have given the captain a bit of news now and then. He was here a couple of minutes ago, bought a ticket to Washington. If you are anxious to see him I will ask the gateman to pass you through. The train is a trifle late in getting out."

"Oh, never mind; thank you so much!" And Nancy bestowed on him the priceless favor of another smile. He was curious to know why a girl of so much refinement and daintiness should be interested in the movements of Mannice at this time of night. By way of detaining her he said:

"I seem to be running a *Tribune* information bureau. The captain asked me if I had seen anything of Fred Stannard. I told him that Stannard had hustled for the Washington train just ahead of him. Fred used to cover Broad Street station when I was in the general passenger agent's office upstairs."

Again Nancy thanked him, and walked uncertainly in the direction of the train platform. The ticket agent looked long at her, sighed, and made two mistakes in checking up his receipts. Alas, Nancy had instantly forgotten him. She was distressed and alarmed, and while she wavered the gate was slammed shut and the heavy train of sleepers moved out among the switch lights of the yard. How could Mannice have known that Stannard intended going to Washington? Fred had told her to say nothing about it in the office. He had seemed anxious to keep it a secret, explaining that it was on confidential business. And Mannice was the last person in the world to whom he would be likely to mention a matter of the sort.

Possibly there was some big newspaper story afoot and Mannice had been assigned to help Stannard. It was like Fred to be close-mouthed when the interests of his paper were concerned. With the air of one determined to see the thing through, Nancy marched into a telephone booth and called up the night city desk of the *Tribune*.

"May I speak with Mr. Mannice?" said she, her sweet voice tremulous with excitement.

"Mannice! He isn't here," was the gruff answer. "He faked up an excuse to get off early to-night. Who is this?"

"A—a friend of his," lied Nancy. "He hasn't been sent out of town then?"

"No. He asked for to-morrow off, but I turned him down. Good night!"

Nancy wafted a kiss at the telephone. The night city editor was a fatherly person who had been exceedingly kind to her and had shown her the pictures of his four children. Very thoughtful, she wandered out to the

waiting taxicab and was driven to the boarding house. Her sense of foreboding was oppressive. No doubt Fred Stannard would think it frightfully silly of her, but here was a set of circumstances which could not be thrust aside. Her mood was too restless for sleep. Mannice had been refused a day's leave of absence and was deliberately risking dismissal while he went to Washington because Stannard was in the same train. There was no getting away from this conclusion. And Mannice was not presumed to know that Stannard was going to Washington at all.

At a table littered with clippings, notes, and throbbing missives addressed to Beatrice Clare sat Miss Nancy with her chin in her hand, and gazed blankly at the opposite wall which was dignified by her Wellesley diploma in a narrow ebony frame. The little clock vainly warned her that it had struck the unseemly hour of midnight. At length she impulsively exclaimed:

"He will call me a goose and tease me unmercifully, but I just have to do it. So there!"

She stole downstairs to the telephone in the rear hall and asked for the Western Union office.

"Take a rush message, if you please. To Frederick D. Stannard, a passenger in the Philadelphia sleeper—Washington express—the train that leaves here at ten-thirty, you know. It is very urgent. It can be delivered to him at Wilmington or Baltimore, and the porter must surely wake him up. What is the message? Oh, yes, here it is:

"Mannice on your train. Following you purposely. Do look out for him. It seems terribly queer.

"That is all, thank you. Oh, sign the initials, N. V., and charge to this telephone number. And the message will be delivered without fail before Mr. Stannard leaves the train in Washington? Much sooner than that? What nice people you are!"

CHAPTER V.

Captain William Marmaduke Mannice had no definite procedure in mind. It was for opportunity to show him the time and the place. He flattered himself that he possessed the wit and adroitness to make the journey profitable. As for Stannard, he could write well enough, but he was otherwise callow, his sophistication a pose, argued the captain. It was like taking candy from a child. It was not in Mannice's general plan of action that he should be discovered in the train. Accordingly he steered wide of the Philadelphia sleeper, skirting the shadowy side of the station platform, and passed on ahead to the string of day coaches, of which he chose to enter the smoking car.

There he remained to consume two of the imported cigars which the expense fund of General Miramar enabled him to enjoy. It was plausible to infer that Stannard would seek his berth at once. His had been a busy day for a convalescent, and he became easily fatigued. At the first stop beyond Philadelphia, Mannice hastened toward the rear of the train and halted in the vestibule of the sleeper in which he was particularly interested. The drowsy porter had emerged to open the doors, and Mannice detained him to say, in his affable manner:

"I didn't have time to reserve a berth, George. How are you fixed? Plenty of room in your car?"

"Yes, suh. She's runnin' light tonight. Shall I give you a lower, suh?"

"I'll take it, but I may prefer to sit in your smoking compartment and go to a hotel as soon as we reach Washington. It's a short run and I'm a poor hand at slumber in a rattler."

"You kin have th' smokin' compart-

ment all to yourself to stretch your laigs in, suh. Th' other gen'lemens has all retired an' gone to bed. Right this way, please."

Having gained the desired information, Mannice followed the porter, tipped him liberally, and said in parting:

"By the way, a friend of mine told me he might be on this train to-night. A slim chap, twenty-five or so, rather sallow, clean-shaven, black eyes and hair, speaks with a drawl, gray clothes. Seen anything of him?"

"Why, suttinly, suh, unless there's more'n one of him. A young gen'leman pertainin' to your description got on at Broad Street. He's in lower fo'teen. Looked like he ain't as robustious as you."

"I guess that's my friend Stannard, all right," replied Mannice. "I won't wake him up. If I leave the train early we'll run into each other at breakfast. We always go to the same hotel in Washington."

The porter withdrew to the other end of the car to catch a nap between stations. Mannice lounged in a leather-cushioned chair and depleted the expense fund by another cigar and a long pull at a flask of cocktails. In such an adventure as this the brand of courage called Dutch was to his liking. After a discreet interval he sidled to the open door of the compartment and glanced along the dimly lighted aisle of the car. Only a few of the sections had been made up. The obliging porter had assigned him to lower twelve in order that he might be near his friend. From the berths which were curtained came no sound except a snore or the harsh breathing of heavy sleep.

Mannice nerved himself to take advantage of this alluring opportunity. Quietly he stole along the aisle, and crawled between the curtains of his berth. For some time he sat crouched upon the edge of it. Between him and Fred Stannard there was only the tranverse partition. By unfastening the curtains he could move closer to Stannard's berth and still remain invisible from the aisle. There was the porter to reckon with, but he was not apt to investigate a bulge in a curtain.

Mannice listened, his ear against the partition. Stannard was sleeping soundly enough. The thief delayed, his cowardly heart fluttering. What if Stannard should discover him in the act and shout an alarm? But a man had to be willing to risk something to win two thousand dollars, and perhaps more. It was an odd enterprise for a dashing soldier who almost believed that he had slain the Spanish major in a saber duel at El Caney, but human nature is said to be prone to contradictions. Certainly it was a chicken-hearted Captain William Marmaduke Mannice that sat so long on the edge of the berth and tried to muster his resolution.

At length the train slackened speed, and the humming note of its flight through the night slowly diminished. There was no station near, as Mannice was aware. Almost without jar the train was brought to a stop. Those in the berths were not awakened. Mannice heard the porter open a door of the vestibule and walk along the gravel embankment. He paused to speak to a train hand. They stood near the screened window of lower twelve, and Mannice caught mention of a broken switch and a signal set against the engineer. The conductor ran past them and said something about sending a flag back as there might be ten or fifteen minutes' delay.

The porter and the train hand moved toward the head of the train. There was silence outside, and within there was no stir. The porter was out of the way. There could never be a luckier moment than this. Mannice edged past the partition and gazed down at Stan-

nard's face which was vaguely discernible. Then the fingers of the captain groped swiftly in the pockets of the coat which hung at the foot of the berth. As he had expected, he found nothing. Dexterously he explored the twine hammock and the recessed shelf. What he sought was not there. It was proper, however, to make thorough work of it. Stannard would most likely tuck the packet under his pillow, together with his money and his watch, doubled up in his waistcoat. There was really no other place to search. Anything placed under the mattress would slip through to the floor.

The hand of Mannice slid under the pillow an inch, and then a wary pause. It was as he had conjectured. He felt a flat leather purse, a watch, and the texture of a bulky envelope. Stannard moved a trifle, and muttered something in his sleep. The florid features of the captain were instantly bathed in perspiration. His knees almost let him down. But there was no cause for alarm. Back to his own berth he stole with the booty, taking the purse and the watch as well as the bulky envelope. It was a clever idea, thought he, to cause Stannard to conclude that he had been the victim of an ordinary sneak thief rather than a person who had designs on the Miramar documents. The money and the watch could be returned a little later, in a manner to leave no clew. Mannice had scruples beyond which he refused to descend. The honor of a gentleman balked at picking the pockets of one who had befriended him. An affair of state was a horse of another color.

"I can't see that I need this train any longer," he said to himself, retreating to the smoking compartment. "I take no chances of bumping into Stannard. I hate to do it, but pounding the ties to the nearest town is my one best bet. There will be other trains in the morning, and they run both ways."

With this, he flitted through the car and swung himself off to hail the porter and inquire:

"Where the deuce are we, anyhow, George? Stalled in the wilderness?"

" 'Bout four miles this side o' Perryville, suh, and th' Susquehanna bridge right across from Havre de Grace. She'll be startin' up mighty soon now."

Mannice walked back to the rear of the train, where the darkness hid him from the sight of the porter. Instead of climbing into the vestibule he picked his way down the embankment, stumbled across a ditch, came to a fringe of woodland, and sat himself upon a stump to await the departure of the train before setting out on foot for Perryville. He did not relish the prospect of tramping four miles on a railroad track, but he was too highly elated to let it spoil his temper. A fleeting glance at his plunder before he left the train had shown him that there had been no mistake. For judgment and execution his night's work had been flawless.

Fred Stannard slept serenely until the train reached Baltimore. Then the porter shook him by the shoulder and repeated in his ear:

"Mistah Stannard! Mistah Frederick D. Stannard! Wake up, please, suh! Telegram marked urgent, suh. Telegram for you, understan'? Jes' now brung aboa'd, Union station, Baltimo'."

"Quit mauling me. I get you!" snarled the dazed reporter, yawning mightily. "I'm Stannard. How did you guess it? Turn up a light. I'm no owl. All right. Excuse my peevishness. Where's the message? Now how did the *Tribune* find me?"

He thrust a curtain aside, and blinked at the written words. Amusement, incredulity, then gratitude, were his suc-

cessive emotions, gratitude that Nancy should have cared so much.

"God bless her!" he cried. "How did she happen to dream this?"

He did the one logical thing, which was to toss his pillow to the other end of the berth and gaze at the corner where he had deposited his waistcoat wrapped about his purse, his watch, and the envelope containing the Miramar papers.

"Nancy's tip appears to have been straight," said he, still staring at the berth. "Was I the easy mark? Ought I to be roaming at large? Well, hardly. If Captain William Marmaduke is still aboard, perhaps I had better have some chatter with him. I wouldn't wrong him for worlds, but——"

The porter's complexion was a shade lighter, and his voice quavered as he exclaimed:

"Why you look that-a-way, Mistah Stannard? Has you done been robbed?"

"Cleaned out, Henry. He even took my self-respect. Tell me, have you seen anybody in this car that looked as if he belonged to a name like Captain William Marmaduke Mannice?"

"A high-soundin' gen'lemen with manners what didn't jes' quite fit him like he was raised to 'em? That name suttinly does favor th' passenger in lower twelve. He ain't been in bed at all. You'll find him in th' smokin' compartment right now, Mistah Stannard. A friend of yours, he done told me hisself. If you will please make a repo't of the robbery to th' conductuh, suh——"

"Plenty of time for that, Henry," said Stannard as he shot into his clothes. The train was rolling out of the Baltimore station as he charged into the smoking compartment, which was empty. The porter peered over his shoulder puzzled, almost tearful as he stammered:

"C-come to think of it, I ain't seen that man since we was stopped t'other side o' Perryville. I was busy shinin' shoes an' clean forgot him. Where he gone?"

"I shall take a walk through the train, Henry, but something tells me he is no longer in our midst. However, this telegram has spoiled his get-away. A friend of mine, did he say? A few friends like that would make the Rockefeller family talk poverty."

"An' I put him in lower twelve," moaned the porter, "right handy to you."

"You are blameless, Henry. And we'll say nothing to the conductor. That lets you out, and it is perfectly satisfactory to me."

"You ain't goin' to make a holler, suh? Did you lose much?"

"Everything but a little loose change that he overlooked, Henry. It was a transaction between—er—between friends, as you might say."

"Come to study over it, Mistah Stannard, I'se 'bliged to believe that man wa'n't no frien' o' yourn. He didn't look like your kind o' folks. Of cou'se I don't pass opinions on mah passengers as a rule, but this yere Cap'n Willyum Marmaduke man had signs an' symptoms of genteel disrespectability."

"I never heard him sized up more neatly," smiled the reporter as he moved in the direction of the day coaches.

As he had expected, there was no Mannice. Back to his berth strolled Stannard to occupy himself with a series of highly interesting speculations. His journey to Washington had been made a fool's errand. It concerned him only as a place in which he might borrow the price of a ticket back to Philadelphia. The telegram from Nancy Veeder puzzled him beyond measure. The mystery of it thrust the perfidious Mannice into the background of his thoughts. She had known noth-

ing of this when they parted in the Broad Street station with the taxicab waiting to take her to her boarding house. In what sort of an unexpected and belated adventure could she have stumbled upon the information which he now knew to be true?

This phase of the problem was so hopeless of solution, so distractingly absorbing to a young man who had discovered that he was in love that he sternly strove to let it await Nancy's explanation. The more sensible procedure was to focus his wits on the case of Captain William Marmaduke Mannice and his motive for pillaging the Miramar documents. Straightway Stannard methodically applied his mind to it as he would have tried to pick up the threads of a baffling newspaper story. Given the deed and the man, one looked for the motive. This was easy, so far as Mannice himself was concerned. Money was his motive. On a spot-cash basis he would sell himself for any proposition. But this was really inconsequential. Who was "the man higher up," the other party to the bargain? Stannard had no evidence to connect General Rodigro Miramar with the transaction. His deductions led him in another direction.

Willis Croyden had told the owner of the *Tribune* that he, Stannard, had the documents, and what they were. J. R. Estabrook wished to suppress them in order to protect his own financial affiliations. He had found Mannice of service in detecting the local political currents which ran beneath the surface. This was office gossip. That a man so wealthy and powerful as the proprietor of this great newspaper property should instigate a theft to gain his end seemed incredible, and yet Stannard said to himself:

"Funny things do happen in big business. There was the story I covered of the railroad freight clerk who was bribed to give a record to the International Utilities Trust of all shipments made by independent competitors. An automobile hit him in front of the trust's offices, and they found the memoranda in his clothes. Estabrook was mighty anxious to see me, and when I ducked it may be that he put Mannice on my trail. Anyhow, the joke seems to be on a young man named Stannard, whose opinion that he was a pretty wise guy is shot full of holes."

If this train of reasoning was on the right track, then it was plausible to assume that Mannice would double back to Philadelphia in order to deliver the goods to his employer. But was this to be taken wholly for granted? Stannard's task was to try to outguess a man with a crooked mind. Of course Mannice would examine the documents, and if, as he asserted, his checkered career had included a newspaper job in Havana, he would probably know enough of Spanish to get at the significance of the contents. He would not hesitate to break faith with J. R. Estabrook if he thought he could make a better bargain with General Miramar or with one or more of the capitalists and promoters implicated in the conspiracy with Victoriano Huerta.

"This Miramar may be in Washington," reflected Stannard, "and also some of the bunch of high financiers who are lobbying for armed intervention. Mannice knows what J. R. Estabrook will cough up. It's a good bet that they came to an understanding. Now won't he ramble into Washington first, before he goes back to Philadelphia, just to frame up a dicker and feel the market? The genial captain isn't apt to overlook the main chance. As a holdup artist I should say that he has talent."

Stannard was too restless to remain in the sleeping car after the train reached Washington. In that city there was one man to whom he could safely confide his troubles, Harry Gray, the veteran correspondent, who had been

for many years in charge of the *Tribune* bureau. He was respected in the White House, and feared in the halls of legislation. His home was in a hotel much frequented by statesmen, real and alleged. Thither went Fred Stannard with his suit case and engaged a room, hopefully expecting to pay for it. At three o'clock in the morning he presumed that Harry Gray had gone to bed, but the night clerk replied to his query:

"Mr. Gray sent down for ice water not ten minutes ago, and the boy said he was pounding the life out of his typewriter machine."

"Then I'll break in and make him quit it," observed Stannard.

An impatient growl answered his knock at the door. Stripped of coat, collar, and shoes, the bald and corpulent Mr. Gray was toiling in a cloud of cigar smoke, the floor and table an apparent confusion of newspapers, government bulletins, and scraps of memoranda. Recognizing the reporter, he shoved back the eye shade, lumbered from his chair, and thundered jovially:

"Hello, my boy! I thought you were one of the poker party across the hall, and I came near shying a book at your head. They know my weakness, confound 'em! They've been trying to tempt me. What is it this time? Word pictures of famous men? Impressionistic flub-dub? You do put that sort of stuff over devilish well."

The compliment pleased the youngster immensely. He stood in awe of Harry Gray as an Olympian among newspaper men, the dean of the picked corps of Washington correspondents.

"I came down on business of my own," said Stannard. "You seem to be up to your ears in something or other."

"A review of the administration to date, effects of low tariff, the Mexican policy, the currency bill, and God knows what," sighed the veteran. "Croyden wired that he must have it for Sunday. Never mind that. That Breakwater trip nearly did for you, I hear, Fred. You still show it. Keep away from work for a month. Go South or something."

"Not quite yet, thank you," was the emphatic reply. "I can't go anywhere until I touch you for the fare to Philadelphia. If you had time I could tell you a tale of trouble that might amuse you."

"Fire away!" cried Harry Gray, leaning back and fishing from his trousers a rumpled wad of bills. "Help yourself, and then please proceed to amuse me. I need it."

"I was explored in a sleeper to-night for my watch, money, and some rather valuable papers," began Stannard, "which reminds me to ask how well you know one Bill Mannice."

"Bill Mannice!" hotly ejaculated Gray. "Is he doing work as coarse as that? He must have hit the bad end of the toboggan. Do you mean that he actually pilfered you?"

"Oh, he took the watch and the coin as a blind. He wanted the papers. I got hold of them quite by accident, and thought it right to put the government wise to them. They were from Huerta to such parties as Allen V. Hough, the Westheims, and Senator Charlton Stout——"

Harry Gray's broad, deeply lined features expressed shrewd, jocular comprehension as he raised his hand and exclaimed:

"You've said it, young man. It goes no further. We are in executive session. You were about to mention the Maxwell Syndicate, no doubt, and possibly the banking house of Halkitt, Stevenson & Brent, with its London connections. All tarred with the same brush. For Heaven's sake, whose safe did you break into?"

"I filched them from General Rodi-

gro Miramar," calmly acknowledged Stannard.

"Determined to be a real newspaper man, aren't you? Well, well, and then some! I saw Miramar in this hotel yesterday, dining with Allen V. Hough himself! Did you offer this information to the *Tribune?*"

"You bet I did, Mr. Gray. It looked big to me, the most important thing I ever pulled off. Willis Croyden turned me down flat, and——"

"And he put it up to J. R. Estabrook, of course. Did you happen to know that Estabrook married a stepdaughter of former Senator Charlton P. Stout, who persuaded him to invest a couple of millions or so in Mexican properties?"

Stannard murmured sheepishly:

"I wasn't wise to that. I suppose I ought to have known it. I should like to let the administration have a look at those papers, Mr. Gray. The *Tribune* has been awfully white to me. I can't offer the stuff to another paper, but I am enough of a patriot to be sore on this Miramar proposition. This crowd is playing with marked cards."

"Will Mannice come to Washington?"

"It is an even break, Mr. Gray. I am not ready to have him locked up for looting my watch and pocketbook. Publicity in connection with those documents isn't what I am looking for. My own title is clouded."

"Captain Bill Mannice!" reflectively observed Gray. "There is a man who never learned that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. He just naturally has to steer a crooked course. At Tampa in ninety-eight young Dorwood, of the New York *Chronicle,* was on his back with typhoid. Mannice was strutting about in uniform. Dorwood had a lot of bully photographs to mail to his sheet, he had snapped them himself, and he asked Mannice to send them for him. They had worked together on the same paper, mind you. Mannice sold the pictures to the *Mercury* as his own exclusive stuff, and got a nice, juicy check in payment."

"The yellow dog!" exclaimed Stannard. "And what did poor Dorwood do about it?"

"He was too ill to do anything then. When he saw his precious photographs in the *Mercury,* he tucked the papers under his pillow and promptly had a relapse. They pulled him through, however, and the next time he met Bill Mannice was on a railroad-wreck story in Delaware. Dorwood was a lightweight, but game. He sailed into the captain with a broken piece of a brake rod, and put him in a hospital. You know that long scar on his chin? That's how he got it."

"Pardon me, but it was in combat with a Spanish major at El Caney," gravely observed Stannard.

"Oh, you never fell for that yarn," laughed Harry Gray. "Now, see here, Fred, you landed yourself in a wild-eyed sort of project when you decided to hold out this Miramar stuff. But far be it from me to scold. You could have made a lot of money out of it, I understand that. To find that you put principle ahead of lucre is rather refreshing. I presume you are anxious to put the kibosh on Bill Mannice's operations?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Gray. My notion is that he will play J. R. Estabrook against General Miramar, and put the screws to both of them by threatening to sell the documents to some newspaper—the New York *Mercury,* for instance."

"And Bill hopped off your train the other side of Baltimore? Then if he comes on to Washington he will turn up here during the forenoon. Why not let me keep track of him at this end, while you go back to Philadelphia and watch for him there?"

"But you are too busy to bother with my foolish complications," Stannard protested. "I ought to drop it, perhaps, but it makes me sore to think of letting Mannice get away with a blackmailing campaign like this."

The veteran correspondent looked severe as he said:

"It will be no bother at all. Mannice passed a bad check on me several years ago. I did nothing about it, for he was married then. She divorced him later. I have friends both in the Washington police and the government service. If it should seem advisable at any time to clap Mannice in jail, why, I can have the warrant issued with that bad check as a pretext."

"But I didn't expect you to——"

"Go to bed, my boy," was the peremptory command. "This is fun for me. And it is high time that Bill Mannice was run out of journalism, for the sake of the decent men in the profession. The *Tribune* ought not to tolerate him. Willis Croyden has no use for him. He must have some sort of a pull with the owner. I'll keep you posted. Better take a morning train back. I shall sleep until noon."

Harry Gray began to pound the keys of his typewriter, turning his head to nod farewell. In a glow of gratitude, Fred Stannard went to his room to snatch a few hours' rest.

CHAPTER VI.

At noon next day Stannard rang the bell of the Spruce Street boarding house which was privileged to shelter the dual personality of Miss Nancy Veeder and Beatrice Clare. Hitherto the two rôles had been sternly kept apart. Nancy, the industrious and practical young newspaper woman, had nothing in common with the excessively sentimental temperament of the mythical Beatrice. Within twenty-four hours, however, life had become rather confusing. Nancy found herself in agreement with Fred Stannard's opinion that the trouble with daily journalism was its interference with the home and fireside. Of course, he had not actually offered her a home and fireside, but if ever there was a man who needed somebody to take care of him and help him to use his wonderful gift of writing to the best advantage instead of wearing himself out and losing his fine edge——

Here the reflections of Nancy came to an abrupt halt, and she berated herself in the severest terms imaginable. The Beatrice Clare stuff was demoralizing her, she declared to herself.

It was with quite unwonted embarrassment that she went downstairs to meet Fred Stannard, whose languid manner was laid aside as he said in greeting:

"I reached town ten minutes ago, and flew over to thank my good angel. Likewise I was due to report all well. That telegram of yours was witchcraft. How in the world did you know so much, Nancy?"

"You are so surprised that I showed a gleam of human intelligence, aren't you?" she cried mockingly. "Why should I tell you? You were so amusingly secretive about that trip to Washington—couldn't tell me what it was all about! It reminded me of Mannice, with his 'important, very important'!"

"The comparison is downright insulting," he declared, "but I humbly confess that I was an ass."

"I don't want you to be humble, Fred Stannard. Now, for Heaven's sake, do tell me if anything happened? Was my intuition all rubbish? Did you see Mannice?"

"He saw me first," was the dry answer, "but your message enabled me to plot his curves. He had burgled me while I slept."

"Oh, dear, and I was too late," cried Nancy, wringing her hands. "Little

gump that I was to sit and fidget for an hour before I made up my mind to warn you! I was so afraid you'd laugh at me."

"No fear. As an object for laughter I am in a class by myself. I am ready to tell you all, if you will own up and elucidate how you turned the trick."

"A bargain! But I must be starting for the office. Can't we walk and talk?"

His story of the documents thrilled her deliciously, while the revelation of her wit, audacity, and devotion fairly enraptured him. He hastened to pay her this compliment:

"You ought to be doing live news stuff, not wasted on this woman's page drivel. That stunt of yours would make any star reporter proud of himself. I have received more than one bonus from Willis Croyden for work that wasn't in it with you for quick thinking and real action."

"How kind of you to say it! But I don't want to do live news stuff. I am not looking for a career."

Something in her voice startled Stannard. Wonderment was in his eyes as he glanced at her face. He was no longer stupid. Was it possible that she meant more than the words conveyed? The modest young man blushed and stammered:

"I—I didn't mean that very seriously. Of course, there are more congenial jobs for a nice girl. There is one that I should like to discuss with you, some day—that is, I suppose you would turn it down, of course, but there's no harm in——"

"Fred, is this another attempt at a proposal? If you handle all your important affairs as awkwardly, no wonder I had to act as your guardian and tell you to beware of Mannice."

"I shall get it over at the third try," said he.

"Meanwhile, please promise to let me know about everything, won't you? Now that you have got rid of those dangerous documents, why don't you let well enough alone? You tried to do your duty. Don't be stubborn."

"And be scored on by Captain William Marmaduke Mannice?" frowned Stannard, with an angry gesture. "Honestly, Nancy, I'd hate to live with myself if I thought there was no way to get back at that highbinder. He burgled my self-respect, and I had clung to it for three years in the newspaper game. Naturally, I want to recover it."

"Then I did help you, as a sort of partner?" brightly queried Nancy. "And if you are bound to look for more trouble, will you let me try to help again, and consult with me, instead of being so lofty and mysterious, and—and absurd?"

"I bow to your superior intelligence," said he, offering his hand. "The inherent vanity of my sex must divert the gods."

"The gods gave women a saving sense of humor which they try to conceal," Nancy replied. "Otherwise the pretensions of you men would make us perfectly furious. My superior intelligence advises you to go straight home to bed, Fred Stannard. You look wretchedly tired."

"I am yours to command, Nancy, but I must first see Mr. J. R. Estabrook."

"What fun! Do let me see you afterward. No, we are not going out to dinner to-night. You are to keep perfectly quiet until to-morrow."

A few minutes later, Stannard strolled into the alcove near the local-room door, opened his mail box, glanced at the typewritten mandate from the owner, and went in to his desk. The city editor looked out from his coop in the corner, and sharply exclaimed:

"Where the devil did you take yourself to? Mr. Estabrook has torn the

shop to pieces looking for you since yesterday noon. Wait till I find out whether he has gone out to lunch."

"I found this note from him," mildly returned the reporter. "Sorry I made so much trouble. I am not reporting regularly, as yet, so I ducked out of town overnight. What's it all about? Do you know?"

"Some fool notion, I presume," was the irritable reply. "His hobbies for front-page stories are scandals in high life, automobile accidents, and the philanthropies of the rotten rich. I imagine he has an idea, and thinks you are the reporter to handle it."

"Did Mr. Croyden say anything about it?"

"Only to ask for you. He looked worried, though."

"He ought to," was the star reporter's cryptic comment, as he waited a moment longer, and was informed that Mr. Estabrook would see him at once.

The interview promised to be singularly interesting for Stannard, who was feeling his way in the dark. Puzzled, but outwardly indifferent, he entered the handsomely furnished office. The owner of the *Tribune* was walking the floor, his hands clasped behind him. The tall, slightly stooping figure, the quick stride, the mobile features, conveyed an impresion of restless energy which could not be contented with a life of aimless leisure. At times he was brusque, domineering, a master of men and of millions; again he was charmingly companionable, boyishly unassuming. To Stannard, alert and braced for conflict, he chose to display this latter mood.

"I hoped to get hold of you yesterday," he began, "but Mr. Croyden explained that you were taking things easy, and coming to the office when you felt like it. Quite right. How are you feeling? We are awfully lucky to get you back alive."

"Feeling more or less rocky, thank you," drawled Stannard, accepting a chair.

J. R. Estabrook seated himself at the desk, swung round to face the reporter, lighted a cigarette, and said:

"One can't expect a quick recovery from nervous shock and that sort of thing. I was in that *Moravian* disaster, the Constellation liner sunk in collision off the Lizard a dozen years ago. By Jove, I was in bad shape for six months, couldn't seem to pull myself together, don't you know."

The sea and its tragedies had always appealed to Stannard's imagination. He could not resist asking a question or two, for as a schoolboy he had shuddered over the terrible story of the *Moravian*. Mr. Estabrook described one episode after another, led on by further questioning, smiling as he realized that the tables were turned, and Stannard was interviewing him. It gave the grim recital a touch of incongruous humor. This artfully persuasive young reporter was steering him away from the issue in hand.

"What I really intended to say," observed the owner, "was that after an experience like yours or mine a man should avoid all needless worry, rather coddle his nerves for a while. Now I am under the impression that you are worried about something which, as a matter of fact, does not concern you, that you have taken upon yourself a grave cause for anxiety——"

"You refer to the papers that were washed ashore with General Miramar," bluntly interrupted Stannard, having resolved to make the other man show his hand.

"I do. And I propose to talk it over with you in a friendly way," suavely replied Mr. Estabrook "I gathered from Mr. Croyden that you were unwilling to let me decide whether this was proper material for publication in the *Tribune*. Am I correct?"

"Mr. Croyden could not agree to return the documents to me if you decided against publishing them," stoutly answered Stannard. "That was the nubbin of the argument."

"I rather think you took hold of the wrong nubbin, as you call it," declared the owner, who showed no signs of annoyance. "I admire your zeal, Mr. Stannard, but I venture to dispute the soundness of your judgment in this instance. The *Tribune* stands for clean and honorable journalism, as you know. I disapprove of yellow methods of getting the news. No matter how important the disclosures which you found in those documents, I believe they should have been returned to General Miramar, from whom they were obtained without his consent."

Stannard kept a straight face. In fact, he was perternaturally solemn as he said:

"The first big work I did for your paper, Mr. Estabrook, was the crusade against policy shops in Philadelphia. The town was riddled with them, they were grafting millions a month from those who could least afford it. Even the children were buying policy slips with their pennies. I went after the backers, the syndicate, the policy kings, and cleaned them up. I did it because I got hold of their records through pals of theirs, who had been badly treated and were sore. It was their private papers that gave me the evidence and put five of the biggest policy backers in jail, although they had political pull that had always protected them. I never heard that called dishonorable journalism, and nothing was said to me about surrendering the goods."

The implied comparison appeared to nettle J. R. Estabrook, and he hastened to exclaim:

"You should be able to discriminate, Mr. Stannard. I don't like your headstrong attitude."

"Very well, then," persisted the reporter, "if you thought the Miramar papers were good stuff for the *Tribune* to publish, would you balk at the way in which I happened to get hold of them?"

This was a palpably uncomfortable question, a shot that went straight to the mark. Stannard was talking for the sake of argument, wondering what the trend might mean. If Mr. Estabrook knew that Mannice had the documents, why in the world should they be fencing in this manner?

"I want those papers," quietly spoke the owner. "I think you had better turn them over to me."

"Is that a threat or a suggestion, Mr. Estabrook?"

"Both, perhaps, Mr. Stannard. When I really want a thing, it is rather foolish for a young fellow in your position to be so obstinate."

Stannard cocked a quizzical eye at his lordly employer and slowly informed him:

"I haven't got them, and I don't know where they are. I thought you knew. I seem to have been barking up the wrong tree."

Mr. Estabrook's amazement was too genuine to be simulated. He no longer sprawled in his chair, but leaped up to stand over Stannard, pointing a finger at him as he cried:

"Have you sold them to another newspaper? No, you wouldn't do that sort of a thing while you were on the *Tribune* pay roll, but—but what else would you do with those documents?"

"I didn't do anything. I was done," said Stannard, with a flickering grin. "I may be shy of judgment and a few other things, but I am willing to stake my last cent that you are not trying to bluff me. This seems to be a mutual surprise party."

"You were done out of them, is that what you mean? Who did you?" demanded Estabrook.

"A gentleman of [illegible]une by the name

of Mannice. He works upstairs, when he works. Of course, some one hired him to rob me."

"Presumably General Miramar?" was the swift interrogation.

"Presumably so," agreed Stannard.

"You were not silly enough to suspect me of such a thing?"

"Not after your little sermon on the ethics of separating a man from a bundle of private papers without his consent, Mr. Estabrook."

The irony was obvious, but the owner chose to overlook it. The interview halted. Stannard had nothing more to say. The episode was closed, so far as he was concerned. He perceived, however, that the owner was still anxious, and reluctant to let him go. Stannard wondered why, and searched his mind for a reason. It occurred to him that Mr. Estabrook might suspect that he had made copies of the documents. It was another uneasy idea, however, which prompted the statement:

"I am glad you are rid of that worry, Stannard. I assume that you will forget it. Don't nurse a grudge against this Mannice, and fret yourself into a relapse."

"I intend to get him," doggedly declared the reporter. "And I shall do my best to spoil his game, so help me."

"You refer to those Miramar documents? Confound it, that is a sort of obsession with you. You're hipped. You ought to go away and get built up. I don't like your symptoms. You are really not fit for work, and you just sit around and brood over this thing. Wait a minute. I know what to do for you."

He stepped to the door and spoke to the stenographer, while Stannard tried to find a clew to this intimate interest in his welfare. Mr. Estabrook tarried at his desk to glance over the letters that needed his signature until the stenographer entered with the desired information.

"Now, doesn't this sound attractive to you, Stannard?" was the genial exclamation. "The Union Fruit Company's steamer *Dorinda* sails for Jamaica at noon to-morrow, from Philadelphia. She has accommodations for a few passengers, and you can have a comfortable cabin to yourself. It is a two weeks' round trip, bully weather, nothing like it for tired people with nerves. The *Tribune* will be delighted to buy the ticket. Call it a bonus for good service, if you like. And I want to see you fit for duty again."

Stannard was about to decline with thanks, but on second impulse he concluded to accept the generous suggestion. In the blue eye of J. R. Estabrook there was a glint of hardness, as though he were giving not an invitation, but a command. The reporter ventured to say, by way of unmasking the other's purpose:

"I hate to quit the trail of Captain Marmaduke Mannice just now."

"I should seriously advise you to quit it and forget the Miramar documents, *for the sake of your health,*" was the measured reply.

"Ah, if you really think so, Mr. Estabrook, I shall be glad to take this vacation trip, thank you, very much. The *Dorinda,* did you say, and at noon to-morrow?"

"Yes. The ticket will be sent upstairs to you this afternoon. If I can spare the time, I shall be down to see you off."

Courteously, Stannard reiterated his gratitude, and pleasantly the owner offered his hand as they parted at the door. At the third floor of the building, Stannard left the elevator and lounged into the offices of the woman's department. Nancy Veeder happened to be alone, in a tiny room of her own. Distressful was her plaint as she caught sight of him.

"What *would* you advise a girl to do who is the sole support of an invalid mother and an inebriated father with

a wooden leg, who has an offer of marriage from a widower twenty years older than she, who has four children and a comfortable income—the girl aforesaid being hopelessly in love with a young paper hanger who has been out of work for four months because of a strike. She writes that she can't live without him, the paper hanger, I mean."

"That's easy," promptly observed Stannard. "Tell her to marry the widower, club him to death with her father's wooden leg, and split the comfortable income with the lucky young paper hanger."

"How clever you are at solving every one's problems except your own," said Nancy. "Now what did J. R. Estabrook want to see you about? Did you guess right?"

"For once, but the interview left us both guessing. I succeeded in dropping a few handfuls of sand into Mannice's gear box. J. R. won't bid against Miramar for those papers."

"Then J. R. wasn't guilty, Fred?"

"Not this time, unless he fooled me completely. Miramar is the man higher up, according to the latest returns. J. R. insists that I go into exile for two weeks. He didn't put it just that way. The *Tribune* desires to treat me to a joy ride to Jamaica and back."

"How lovely, for you!" cried Nancy, her emotions in conflict, but unselfishness gaining the upper hand. "It is so much better for you than moping about here." Shrewdly she added: "It is to get you out of the way until this Miramar matter simmers down?"

"I wasn't quite stupid enough to let that get by me. But I used my language to conceal what I thought. It was impolitic to object. I don't feel strong enough for a show-down with J. R., nor am I anxious to hustle for another job until I get back twenty pounds of weight. A man has to be cleared for action when he bucks Estabrook."

"Pooh, you aren't afraid of him," scoffed Nancy. "You have something up your sleeve. I know that odd little air of mystery. Now don't make another mistake and try to hide things from me."

"I promise to give up," said he, "but, honestly, I haven't hatched anything yet. I am incubating. It bores me to be shoved off to the tropics, whether I want to go or not. It didn't seem to occur to J. R. that it meant two weeks away from you."

"I can't quite picture you as grieving for me," was her meditative comment.

"Wait until you begin to get my wails by wireless, Nancy."

They were interrupted by a galley boy with a fistful of proofs marked "rush," and Stannard wandered out, sighing as he went. Tired and dispirited, he sought the quiet of his lodgings, where he loafed in a battered armchair that was a relic of his college years, and nursed a smoldering wrath against Captain William Marmaduke Mannice. The world was out of joint if such a blackguard could go unpunished from one unsavory escapade to another. In this instance, Mannice had pretended friendship in order to betray a friend. Like a cur, he had bitten the hand that fed him. And now he would doubtless turn against General Miramar, his employer, and extract the last possible dollar from the transaction.

For two hours, Stannard sat in the old armchair, his feet on the table, a pipe between his teeth. Then a messenger boy brought him a telegram from Washington, signed with the initials of Harry Gray. It read:

Captain heading for Phila. after stormy session with General M. Am satisfied they failed to close deal. Think he will return. Decided not to have him pinched just yet. With enough rope he will hang himself.

Aroused to a course of action, Stannard sought the Philadelphia office of the Delaware Pilots' Association, down by the Maritime Exchange. That sturdy friend, Dan Quillman, had come up from Lewes to take a steamer down the bay, and was waiting the turn of the tide before going aboard. Boisterous was his greeting as he said:

"The wife and I have been looking for a visit from you—a driftwood log in the fireplace, everything snug—the three of us yarning along about how it all happened. For better or worse? It's all better, believe me."

"I get you, Dan," laughed the reporter. "I am homesick for an evening with you folks. How are the lifesavers?"

"They are afraid the Mexican wolf had gobbled you up. I phoned your shop yesterday, and nobody knew where you were."

"I have never laid eyes on him, Dan, nor heard a word from him."

"But he must have been surgin' somewhere this side this horizon."

"Yes, he surged some. I came down to tell you about it. I want you to stand in on the play, Dan."

"Sure thing, my boy, whatever it is. A friend is a friend, blow high, blow low."

They strolled over to the old Blue Anchor tavern, in Dock Street, where there was a quiet corner and none to listen. Stannard unfolded the lively tale of the documents, and the pilot heard him as attentively as could be expected of a man who had been snatched away from a brief honeymoon and could not keep his thoughts away from the treasure left in Lewes.

"You have held fast to your notions of duty, Fred," said he. "A barnacle could stick no tighter. And you still want to turn those papers over to the government?"

"I haven't given up hope. It is the decent thing to do. And, of course, I am darned sore on Mannice."

"Mannice will get his. Don't you worry," slowly replied the pilot. "You don't know this Mexican buccaneer. I do. If ever there was an ugly sinner to double cross, he is the identical geezer. Wait till he gets wise to the fact that Mannice is trying to make your boss, Mr. Estabrook, come across with the coin."

Thereupon they put their heads together and went into executive session, Stannard explaining that he was about to be deftly exiled to Jamaica. It was a problem of matching his wits against the craft of J. R. Estabrook. The pilot had brains as well as brawn, and he showed himself a dependable right bower. Together they devised a plan which should create considerable surprise in the enemy's camp.

At eleven o'clock next morning, Captain William Marmaduke Mannice presented himself to Mr. Estabrook's stenographer, and demanded an audience on important business, very important. The owner of the *Tribune* was otherwise engaged, but presently asked that Mannice be sent in to him. Urbane was the Estabrook manner, silken the accents, but the stenographer read the signs and knew that wrath was brewing. Mannice perceived nothing ominous, however, and was relieved to encounter so gracious a mood.

"Ah, sit down, Captain Mannice," purred the overlord. "And what is it now? A flurry in politics? I am sure you are not in sympathy with reform of any sort whatever. And how is your health, may I ask?"

"Fine, thank you," was the uneasy response. "Not local politics this time, Mr. Estabrook. You might call it an international episode. I came first to you with the information. I thought you might be interested. It requires more or less delicate explanation. I

have certain documentary material which——"

"At what price, may I inquire, before we go farther?" was the careless interrogation.

"Five thousand dollars, to you," exclaimed Mannice, comprehending that the other man knew what was in the wind.

"A large amount of money. I venture the opinion that you could be purchased, body and soul, for ever so much less," and Mr. Estabrook still smiled.

Mannice was prepared to swallow an insult or two, so he replied in an injured voice:

"If I didn't feel that I ought to be loyal to your interests, I could find another market for this material."

This was too great a provocation. The owner's temper was ablaze. His fist was perilously close to the captain's nose as he rapped out:

"I knew you were a bootlicking, truckling wreck of a newspaper man, but I did not realize that you were so downright rotten. General Miramar hired you to steal those documents from young Stannard. And so you thought you could play both ends against the middle!"

The rum-reddened countenance of Mannice became overcast with a mottled pallor. His heavy body slumped low in the chair. He had been smitten from a clear sky, caught wholly off his guard. He stared at the erect figure of his accuser, and stammered in a low voice:

"That—that's a serious charge to make against a man, very serious."

"Good Heaven, do you expect me to take you seriously, you fat-witted bungler?" was the taunting retort. "Go back to Washington with your plunder. Go to Hades—anywhere you like. But don't come near the Tribune Building again."

"Does that mean that I am fired from the staff?" foolishly faltered Mannice.

"Are you fired? You are so thoroughly fired that I shall order the janitor to stand you on your head if you so much as go upstairs to clean out your desk."

There was no resisting the temptation to add emphasis to this vigorous elocution, and, as Mannice turned to depart, a neatly shod foot shot out and smote him somewhat below the small of his back. The effect was to make the exit both hasty and unceremonious. The hero of the combat with the Spanish major at El Caney showed no inclination to seek redress.

Briskly in his wake Mr. Estabrook sallied out to say to the stenographer:

"I am going to the wharf to see the *Dorinda* sail at noon."

"To say good-by to Mr. Stannard?"

"Yes. I am keenly interested in the young man."

He found his valued reporter upon the deck of the trim, white fruit steamer. There had also come to say farewell another member of the staff, the piquant Nancy Veeder, who had earned distinction in the owner's eyes as a successful Beatrice Clare. He stood aside and waited courteously, for the twain were absorbed in conversation obviously confidential. It was to be conjectured that romance had snatched time to blossom in the editorial department. It seemed cruel to thrust the sea between them, but Miss Nancy was bearing up bravely, and Stannard displayed heroic fortitude. At length he became aware that his employer was in the offing, and he quite cheerfully exclaimed:

"I am here, sir, as per agreement, safely aboard and marked right side up with care."

"And he ought to be flattered, Mr. Estabrook," chimed in Nancy, "that you and I should care to see him off."

"Your presence is enough to turn his head," was the gallant reply.

"My motive is entirely disinterested," she daringly retorted.

"I am concerned only for his health, Miss Veeder," he solemnly assured her, and Stannard forbore to smile.

They walked together into the saloon, and J. R. Estabrook glanced into the stateroom where a steamer trunk and suit case laid any lurking suspicion that the reporter might have intended dodging ashore at the last moment. So meekly had the young man agreed to go to Jamaica and forsake his stubborn interference in the affairs of General Miramar, that Estabrook had been of an uneasy mind. But he was now convinced that Stannard had surrendered as the part of wisdom. Cordial was the great man's manner as he lingered until the whistle blew its warning and the sailors moved to the hoisting tackle at the gangway. Blithely Nancy shook hands with the departing Stannard, and hastened down to the wharf with Mr. Estabrook. The steamer slowly slid out into the river, and the exile waved his cap from the upper deck. He was outward bound for Jamaica, no doubt of it.

No sooner had the *Dorinda* passed below the city and swung into the wider reaches of the Delaware than the solitary passenger climbed to the bridge. The captain stood near the engine-room indicator, and to and fro marched the pilot, a brawny person who answered to the name of Dan Quillman. It seemed a singular coincidence that he should be taking the *Dorinda* to sea. Mighty was his laugh as he said:

"I kept out of your way, Fred, while your gilt-edged boss was aboard for fear he might suspect we had put up a game on him. Captain Nichols here fell in with it as soon as I sprung it on him. We were shipmates years ago in square-riggers, a pair of deep-water pals. There was nothing to it after I managed to get shifted to the *Dorinda,* instead of the steamer I was due to take yesterday. I found a pilot who was willing to swap turns with me. I bribed him with a box of cigars."

"And it will make no trouble for Captain Nichols? You are sure of that?" anxiously demanded Stannard.

"No more than he is willing to risk for a friend that asks a favor of him. And he doesn't like this trick of shipping you off when you didn't want to go."

"It looks like a polite scheme to shanghai you," crisply observed Captain Nichols. "There are more ways of hazing a man than clubbing him over the head. A shipmaster knows what it is to deal with owners who can break him."

Stannard thanked these amiable conspirators, and soon went to the stateroom to lie in his bunk while the *Dorinda* plowed her way toward the lower bay. It was a blessed respite, and he slept for six hours on end. Then Dan Quillman roused him out for supper. In the evening the *Dorinda* passed the lights of Lewes and the long arm of the Breakwater, and met the open sea. The steam pilot boat flashed her answering signals and dropped a yawl to take off Dan Quillman. To the men at the oars he called down:

"Stand by while we lower away a trunk and a bag. A friend of mine is coming off with me."

Stannard waited to say good-by to Captain Nichols, who said warmly:

"Sorry we have to part company, but when a man is bent on doing his duty I'm bound to help him along. If you choose to drop off with the pilot I see no way to stop you. I fetched you down the bay as a friend of his, understand? That ticket to Jamaica you can give back to Mr. Estabrook some day and let him get a refund. If

there is any trouble with the ship's papers about a missing passenger I'll try to square it. I'll be anxious to hear how you finish with this Mexican cyclone named Miramar."

Stannard climbed down the swaying rope ladder and jumped into the yawl. A few minutes later Dan Quillman was escorting him into the pilot steamer's cabin, where four bronzed men were earnestly playing poker. Scornfully refusing to join them, Dan demanded that the boat run in and set him ashore at Lewes. He had better business than gambling with a bunch of sinful pilots. Soon Stannard was tramping beside him across the sand to the little town that overlooked the sea. In the darkened street a door was opened, and the cheerful light disclosed the waiting figure of the trained nurse that was. To Stannard she seemed to embody a steadfast, radiant happiness. The pilot slid a great arm around her waist and kissed her.

"It's a bear! It's a bear!" merrily quoted Stannard.

"Plenty tame enough to eat out of her hand," chuckled Dan.

"And hungry, as usual," said the bride as they went into the sitting room, where the table was set beside the huge fireplace.

"Have you been obeying orders, Mr. Stannard?" she asked. "No excitement and as little work as possible?"

"Well, hardly that, Mrs. Quillman. I'm afraid I have been exceeding the speed limit."

"He is going back on the early-morning train, Emily," broke in the pilot, "so don't scold him. This is a little stretch of calm water. Let him enjoy it. I'm guilty of helping him hunt for trouble."

Eager to absolve the loyal pilot, Stannard told her of his quest and why he could not honorably forsake it. And as she listened he forgot his hot desire of revenge against Mannice. Her serene personality soothed him as when he had tossed with fever. He had let the main issue become obscured. He was striving to be of service to his government, a patriot in time of peace. The very atmosphere of this household clarified his vision. These friends of his had such a simple, untroubled code of conduct. One did as the sense of duty decreed without counting the cost. The bride heard him through, and then expressed her opinion as follows:

"But you think you must vindicate yourself in Miss Nancy Veeder's sight by getting the better of this horrid Mannice. This is really why you hate him so bitterly. Why, she doesn't care a rap for that, I am quite sure."

"But she can't respect me if I let a piker like Mannice make a merry jest of me," protested Stannard.

"She wants to help you win your goal," was the soft reply. "That is a woman's way."

"Trust Emily to hand you the straight gospel, every link of it hand forged," said the pilot, his deep voice vibrant.

Stannard was blinking drowsily at the fire, his mind and body blessedly relaxed in this haven of peace. Dan led him off to bed, and the distant song of the surf was a lullaby. For some time after that the pilot and his wife sat and talked of their guest.

"I couldn't tell him to let go and forget what he set out to do, Emily," rumbled Dan, his strong brown fingers straying over to caress her hand. "And you wouldn't have me persuade him to turn quitter. What would you have thought of me if I had refused to board that Italian tramp four years ago and fetch her in, the one that was so rotten with smallpox that she had only half a crew left alive?"

"I love you for it, Dan," she said, and sighed, "but is it in the line of duty for Fred Stannard to go back to

find this Mannice and General Miramar?"

"He thinks it is, and that's enough for a man with sand in his gizzard."

"I am thinking of the girl, Dan. I believe she loves him."

"Isn't that reason enough for him, Emily, to play the game to a finish? Would she have him think of his own skin? I saw her. She's all there. She's the real thing."

"And can you manage to look after him somehow, Dan, for her sake, to be standing by in case he needs you?"

"That's what I am trying to figure out. He will head straight for Washington from here, and try to force a show-down. And he will turn balky if I suggest going as a convoy. But maybe I can manage to heave in sight if he needs me."

"But you will promise me to run no risk, Dan? I am afraid you are fond of a fight."

"Well, I shouldn't mind laying violent hands on the Mexican gent, and landing a punch on this Mannice swab. It would be flattering them to call it a fight."

CHAPTER VII.

Stannard returned to Philadelphia early next morning, and Dan Quillman went with him, making the excuse that he had business to look after. They parted in the railroad station, the reporter warily keeping under cover until the departure of the next train for Washington. When he dodged into the smoking car, the vigilant pilot climbed into the rear end of the train and ambushed himself in the drawing-room of a Pullman, where he felt safe against discovery. He was enjoying the adventure and hoped to find a stirring episode at the journey's end. He would not intervene so long as Stannard should find clear sailing.

Unaware of this kindly espionage, the reporter hurried from the train at Washington to find Harry Gray. For once the correspondent was in a leisurely humor. Frowning at Stannard with an air of fatherly concern, he exclaimed:

"The busy plotter again! But you are en route to Jamaica, so the office told me in a chatty moment last night, when the leased wire was idle."

"I was. J. R. Estabrook labors under the delusion that I am. And I presume that Mannice got the same tip. Has he showed up again?"

"Yes, late last night. A secret-service friend of mine has kept me posted, as a personal favor, unofficially. Mannice took a room in a cheap lodging house across the city. I can give you the address. He is shy of doing business at Miramar's hotel, I presume. A bit too public. Explain yourself, Fred."

"The cat came back. That's all. This vacation voyage was forced on me, and I side-stepped it. All's fair in war. I outguessed J. R. I know it will cost me my job when he finds it out, but meanwhile I'm on the spot to beat Miramar to the documents. Mannice will have them with him, you see. He can't do business without them. I have a chance to get him with the goods."

"But, you crazy-headed infant, how do you propose to go about it?"

"I dope it out this way," rapidly explained Stannard. "I have killed Mannice's scheme to hold up J. R. Estabrook. And when I jumped ashore from the ship at Lewes, and hiked back, I figured that Mannice would beat it for Washington. He is playing his last card, and he will try to raise the price on Miramar. That means a dicker and delay enough to let me break in. Mannice thinks I am on the briny, safely out of the way, so he will feel in no hurry to close the deal. I don't want to bring the police into it, Mr. Gray. Miramar would prove ownership of the

documents, and they would be turned over to him. It may be useful as a threat. But this is really my own private affair."

Harry Gray thought it over before he replied:

"My dear boy, do you propose to tackle Mannice single-handed? Aren't you biting off more than you can chew?"

"It is my own little personally conducted game, thank you," was the dogged affirmation.

"Then go to it, and God bless you!" cried the older man. "I was once young and high-stepping, and believed that valor had discretion beaten a mile. I can't very well go with you. You know why. I happen to be in charge of the *Tribune* bureau, and I can't work against my owner's interests. But between us, Fred, and not for publication, I shall be Johnny on the spot if you really need me."

Stannard promptly vanished in the direction of the shabby quarter of the city to which Mannice had betaken himself. Harry Gray walked the floor uneasily, chewed a cigar, and wished he had forcibly restrained the impetuous reporter. Presently there entered the office a burly, redly tanned man, whose gait proclaimed the seafarer. He had a comically stealthy air, as though intrigue and subterfuge were outside his experience.

"Quillman is my name—Delaware pilot by trade," said the visitor. "I am out of soundings at present. Maybe young Stannard told you how I took him out of the *Dorinda* last night."

"So you are in the plot?" smiled Gray. "I, too, plead guilty."

"It's wiser to let him chart his own course," soberly quoth the pilot. "He doesn't know I followed him to Washington in case he piles himself on the rocks. I saw him bolt out of here just now. Perhaps you know where he went. You've been a good friend to him. He told me about it."

"I don't yet know whether I am a friend or a meddler," was the doubtful reply, "but I am mighty thankful that you have turned up, Mr. Quillman. You will overhaul him at this address. Let me write it down for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Gray. I just want to be within signalin' distance of the lad, that's all."

Captain William Marmaduke Mannice had managed to pull himself together after that disastrous interview in the private office of J. R. Estabrook. Devoting himself to a mellowed brand of rye whisky, he found that his lacerated emotions could be healed. He began to hold up his head and look mankind in the face. After all, he was glad to leave the *Tribune* staff. The accursed sheet had never recognized his merits. As for the painful manner of his going, that had been one of those unfortunate mischances which one risked when gambling for a heavy stake. Overnight he patched together the fragments of his self-assurance. A few drinks before and after breakfast, and he was almost ready to believe that he had slain the Spanish major at El Caney.

The potent rye restored his bravado. He would now ring up the curtain for the final scene with General Rodigro Miramar. Two thousand dollars? Pah! If the Mexican wanted those documents, he must pay through the nose for them. Captain Mannice could then afford to laugh at a beggarly newspaper job, and roam in search of opportunity, to South America or the Orient, where there was proper scope for a gentleman adventurer.

This time General Miramar must come to see him. In the morning he sent a message to the hotel, but the general had gone to see a regimental cavalry drill at Fort Meyer. Mannice had,

therefore, to wait until afternoon for the momentous interview. Possibly there might be argument, he reflected. He proposed to have his own way. Therefore he swaggered into a pawnshop near the lodging house and bought a small revolver. It would be persuasive. He disliked the idea of being kicked out of a room. One experience of this sort was enough. His demeanor was large and vainglorious. It was Captain Mannice rehabilitated by the necromancy of John Barleycorn.

At noon there came a messenger with a brief note. General Miramar would give himself the pleasure of calling between two and three o'clock. As the time drew near, Mannice opened a window of the room on the third floor back. His head throbbed and his throat was dry. The liquor was dying in him, and he poured a drink from a flask into the tumbler on the washstand. It made him shudder and cough. He had taken enough. It would be a mistake to overdo it. He sat down in a chair facing the door, at which he gazed with a fitful intensity.

The door opened without noise. He had heard no sound of footsteps on the stairs. He brushed a hand across the eyes. It was no hallucination of ragged nerves. Fred Stannard advanced to the center of the room, and placed his hat upon the rickety little table.

In physical appearance they were most unevenly matched. It seemed absurd that Stannard should dare to bully the florid, broad-chested Mannice, who had lorded it as one sure of his prowess. It was characteristic of the type, however, that in a crisis which caught him unprepared, he should reveal himself as a counterfeit. Stannard was surprised at his own temerity. He had taken it for granted that at close quarters Mannice would eat him alive. But he boldly stepped up to the disorganized captain and gripped him by the arm. It trembled to the pressure of his nervous fingers, and the flesh was as soft as a woman's.

"Hello, William Marmaduke," drawled Stannard. "What ails you? Took me for a ghost, did you? Unexpected, am I?"

"You—you sailed for Jamaica yesterday," mumbled the other. "W-what are you butting in here for?"

"For my watch and twenty dollars of my good money, as one errand. I am disappointed in you, Bill. I thought you meant to return my own stuff. Too busy?"

"You must be off your nut," and Mannice tried to push him aside. "What are you raving about?"

"Come now, produce! Give up, Bill. I'll admit that my ownership of those documents was open to argument, but it was going too far to pinch my watch and coin while I slumbered in lower fourteen."

Mannice wiped his forehead. Stupefaction tied his glib tongue. Where and how had Stannard obtained this certain knowledge? It must have been Stannard, then, who had denounced and uncovered him to J. R. Estabrook. Dazed was his aspect as he replied:

"I swear I don't know what you are driving at. There seems to be—there seems to be a misunderstanding."

"Not on my part. Shall I go fetch a cop? That twenty dollars was honest money, and it looked big to me."

"Don't do it, Fred," huskily implored Mannice. "Don't do it."

He was groping in his pockets as he spoke. Genuine shame and contrition were written on his features. He had meant to return the watch and money, but Stannard doubted it, and this doubt stripped him of the last rag of self-respect. "Don't have me arrested for something I never intended. You would have found the stuff in your mail box to-morrow, so help me."

Stannard slowly counted the small

roll of bills, and absently wound his watch. He did not quite know what to do next. His unforseen appearance had shaken Mannice's nerves, and surprised him into a confession. He had been braced for the encounter with General Miramar, and Stannard had taken him in flank. They moved out into the room, watchfully eying each other, until the small table was between them. Mannice stole an occasional glance at the door, and his hand went to the breast of his coat, a telltale gesture of which he was unconscious. Stannard perceived that he was expecting General Miramar. It was now or never, swift action or failure. The reporter's only weapon was an undaunted, reckless determination to take those documents away from Mannice, whom he believed to be a coward when cornered.

"I couldn't be sure you had the papers with you, until now," said Stannard. "I know just which pocket they are in. I have come to get them."

"And sell them to General Miramar yourself?" was the snarling retort. "Oh, no, you won't. I guess I'll return them to the man you stole them from."

He was sparring for time. Stannard's face was paler than usual. He had taken the other man's measure. This was a much bigger game than Mannice had ever dared to play. It would not take much to break his nerves. The odds were not as unequal as appeared. With a mirthless laugh, Mannice added:

"Sit down and have a drink, old man. A pretty wise guy yourself, aren't you? Perhaps we can frame up a compromise. How would five hundred look to you, easy money? I'm willing to split the purse. All you have to do is walk out and wait for me."

Stannard leaned across the table as he said:

"I could have taken the documents straight to Miramar and pulled down the price he offered you, you poor, besotted fool. You can have just one minute to think it over. Give me those papers, *or I'll kill you.*"

The words sped like bullets. Mannice gasped and stared. This was not the easy-going Fred Stannard, of the *Tribune* office, this white-lipped fanatic who indubitably meant what he said. Mannice bethought himself of the small revolver bought in the pawnshop. It seemed the psychological moment to display it. He put a hand to his hip pocket and attempted to jerk the weapon out. The hammer caught, and he had to fumble and tug.

Stannard was the quicker of the two. Snatching up the small table with both hands, he dashed it at Mannice's head. It was a disconcerting missile. Mannice tried to ward it off with the hand which held the revolver. The flying table smote him on the knuckles, and he dropped the revolver, which went spinning beneath the bed. Deflected, but not checked, the flimsy table dealt him a blow on the bridge of the nose, and he staggered back, clasping that sensitive organ and grunting with pain. Nothing could have been better calculated to disarrange his tactics.

It would be inaccurate to say that Stannard followed the table. He appeared to arrive simultaneously with it. He was all fists and feet in a whirlwind of sparks, the attack seemed positively fiendish. He had no chance to rally. His bulky arms flailed the air, but the flabby muscles lacked driving power, and too much rum had made him scant of breath. Stannard was industriously pounding that damaged nose which the owner tried to shield, retreating until he staggered against the bed. With brilliant generalship, Stannard poked him in the stomach, and he sat down abruptly, in a heap.

Instantly Stannard shoved a hand into the breast pocket and plucked out

the packet of documents. It had been absurdly easy. Mannice was as colossal a bluff as ever walked on two legs. He attempted to flounder from the bed and renew the conflict, but Stannard had wheeled and was running toward the door. Halfway across the room he halted and recoiled, frozen in his tracks.

Facing him was the sinister figure of General Rodigro Miramar, in whose gloved hand gleamed the long, thin blade of a knife with an ivory hilt. His attire was punctiliously correct for afternoon wear. He might have been on his way to a tea or a reception. His upper lip was lifted in the semblance of a smile, which suggested something cruel, implacable.

"Ah, it is the young Señor Stannard, in great haste to depart," he murmured pleasantly. "And the brave Captain Mannice is much disordered and vanquished. A quarrel? Let us see what it is about."

Stannard was breathing hard, his gaze drawn to the wicked knife which he knew the Mexican would use without hesitation. Mannice took advantage of the diversion to crawl under the bed and find the revolver, which he pointed at Stannard's back with wavering aim. Betwixt the devil and the deep sea, Stannard stood where he was, and could think of nothing to say. Mannice had recovered sufficiently to exclaim:

"Just in time, General Miramar. Stannard refused to give up the papers without a fat rake-off—he demanded fifty-fifty. While we were discussing it, he hit me with a table and knocked me unconscious."

Miramar seemed amused. Jauntily twisting the black mustache, he observed:

"So? You are quite certain that Señor Stannard demanded of you a share of what I promised to pay? That was what you told me at our interview before this one—that you found it necessary to return to Philadelphia to arrange with young Stannard."

"Exactly, general," fluently answered Mannice. "He stood out for two thousand—wanted to hog it all, or nothing doing, but I thought I had him in a reasonable mood to-day. Do you doubt a gentleman's word?"

The general sucked in his breath with a whistling sound. His dark features were perfectly composed, as he said:

"I always believe the word—of a gentleman. I have here a telegram sent to me in care of the chargé d'affaires for Mexico. It is from the very influential Señor J. R. Estabrook. His investments in Mexico are large. He convinces me that you are an enormous liar, Captain Mannice. It was to him you went yesterday, not to young Stannard. It is revealed to me in this telegram that you would give me, what do you call it, the double cross."

Waving the revolver by way of emphasis, Mannice protested:

"That's all rot. I had the documents for you. Stannard robbed me of them, I tell you. Take 'em away from him, and pay me my price. Are you trying to welsh on me?"

"It was a mistake to suppose you would stay bought," Miramar replied, with a shrug. "It is too late for that bargain of ours. I have dirtied myself with you. There is a dividing line. Below it are the blackguards with whom one cannot have connections. I have bought men, but never one like you. I spit you out."

"Not while I have a gun in my hand," cried Mannice, but he quivered at the sight of the devilish knife.

"Give me that little pistol!" was the harsh command. "What a pity it is that you have not the courage to shoot even yourself. It is the custom of my country to execute traitors without delay. Go, Captain Mannice, or I cannot promise myself to resist the pleasure of

sticking this knife between your ribs. Go! - *Vamos!*"

Slowly, unsteadily, Mannice walked out of the room, cowed, beaten, ruined. Stannard listened while he went pounding down the stairs. There was a long silence in the room, and upon the third floor of the lodging house no one else stirred. At this hour of the day the place was emptied of its toilers.

Lithely poised, General Miramar confronted Stannard, who realized that this opponent was infinitely dangerous. And yet the Mexican seemed rather respectful than hostile as he said:

"The matter is now between us two. You did wrong to steal from me at the shipwreck, but you were good enough to save my life, and you have cherished an honorable loyalty for the government of your country. It was brave, also, so cleverly to conquer the great Captain Mannice and his little pistol. But I must have those documents of mine, if you please, Señor Stannard. I am fair. The two thousand dollars will be yours immediately."

Stannard looked at the knife. He had not thought of shouting for help. He was too intensely occupied with the issue, with the choice which he was compelled to make.

"In a way, the papers belong to you, General Miramar," he replied, speaking with difficulty, "but I made up my mind that they more rightly belonged to the President of the United States. so I shall have to tell you to keep that two thousand dollars in your pocket. I'm not ready to sell out. You see, I'm not one of your millionaire syndicates with interests in Mexico."

"It is fine language you speak," was the smooth comment. "But I have no time to listen to these splendid sentiments. You will give me the documents, Señor Stannard. Consider how you are fixed. I am compelled to kill you with this knife? Who will suspect General Rodigro Miramar? I go from this room to the embassy of Brazil, where the most distinguished people come to meet me. It is an affair in my honor. Captain Mannice? I will easily shut his mouth with money."

"Yes, it would be hard to fasten the job on you," agreed Stannard, his voice unsteady. "And you wouldn't let the risk stop you. I suppose I'm a fool. Honestly, I'm scared to death. But I just now saw Bill Mannice curl up and quit like a yellow dog, and it turned my stomach. I can't afford to be that kind, really."

"You refuse, then," and Miramar bared his teeth.

"It's up to you," cried Stannard, with a sob, ready to launch himself at the door in a wild endeavor to break past that wicked knife. He expected to die. Too late he tried to shout. His voice cracked and stuck in his throat. Miramar ran at him, crouching, wonderfully agile. Poor Stannard dodged to avoid the thrust, his foot was tripped by a ragged hole in the carpet, and he fell to his knees.

Before Miramar could pounce on him, there appeared as if by magic a large, active man, with a red head. In one bound he traversed the distance from the door. He alighted on top of General Rodigro Miramar, who flattened out as though the roof had fallen on him. The knife went flying. Deftly, Dan Quillman rolled his breathless victim over and searched out the "little pistol." He clapped a hand over the general's mouth, and sat upon his chest, while he apologized to the trembling Stannard.

"I came near waiting a second too long, Fred. I was standing in the hall with my ear at the crack of the door. Mannice was too messed up in his mind to see me when he went out."

"But, confound it, Dan, why didn't you waltz in sooner?" peevishly demanded the young man. "I don't know

how the deuce you got here, but it's all a giddy nightmare, anyhow."

Fond and proud was the smile that illumined the rugged countenance, as the pilot answered:

"I had to see how you stood the test, my boy. It was right and proper for me to let you work it out alone. I didn't interfere. You won without me. You held your course right to the finish, and never flinched. Whew, he all but knifed you. Some quick and sudden, wasn't he."

"I—I feel like b-blubbering," confessed Stannard. "W-what are you going to do with the general, Dan?"

"Throw him downstairs," was the prompt response, "and I hope he bumps all the way."

With this the pilot nimbly hoisted his prisoner from the floor, swung him across his shoulder like a sack of grain, and strode into the hall. The general was in no condition for active resistance. He had collided with a human pile driver. Stannard heard a thump, then another, then a rapid series of them, and faint cries of anguish. Presently Dan returned, his grin broad and gratified.

"He won't come back, Fred. You ought to have seen him bounce, heels over head, just like a rubber man. My, but it pleased me. I never did like the cuss. Well, you stood the gaff, boy. You found out that there's worse things in life than dying."

"But if you hadn't waltzed in, he would have killed me, Dan!"

"You didn't know I was here. That's the point, Fred. You win, I tell you, just as much as if the Mexican had cut you all to ribbons. Now, what next? Shall we unload those infernal documents?"

"Yes, at the White House. Find a cab and let me phone Harry Gray that I'm all right."

"You are certainly the busy little patriot. Come on, then, full speed ahead."

Falling downstairs was apparently a commonplace event in the lodging house. The exit of General Miramar had caused not a ripple of excitement. Arm in arm, Stannard and Dan departed, while from a window of a saloon across the street a portly, battered gentleman of fortune, with a disfigured beak, watched them and scowled ferociously. The stars in their courses had been singularly unkind to Captain William Marmaduke Mannice.

The president's secretary was patiently trying to clear his office of congressmen, journalists, and patriots anxious to serve their country at almost any salary. To him surged Dan Quillman, with Stannard in tow. The pilot made a passage for himself like a liner in a crowded fairway. It was not in his honest head to be intimidated by anybody or anything. The entrance was effective. Nothing short of violence could have halted it. Stannard was for waiting his turn, but Dan urged him to show a bold front, and make his business known. The secretary, trained to winnow the wheat from the chaff, perceived that these were neither cranks nor office seekers. As soon as he could make it convenient, he said to Stannard:

"You came in here with Harry Gray some time ago, didn't you? Are you still with the *Tribune?"*

"I really don't know. I haven't had time to find out. But this is not a *Tribune* assignment. Do you mind glancing over this bundle of papers? I think you will want to show them to the president."

"And a lively game it was to get them this far," observed the pilot. "Shipwrecks—robberies—knives and guns, and so forth."

The secretary was interested, and no wonder. Seldom was the routine of his day's work so enlivened. He began

to shuffle the documents. His eye caught the names of Rodigro Miramar, Victoriano Huerta, of the American capitalists involved in the conspiracy to thrust the United States into a war for private gain. He turned to say to Stannard in guarded tones:

"I am going to send over to the state department for a Spanish interpreter. You are quite right. The president should have this information at once. You had better come along with me, I think."

"It's fair weather for you now, Fred," heartily exclaimed the pilot. "I'll wait for you at Harry Gray's office."

"But you belong in the piece, Dan. You turned the big trick. I want to tell the president what a great man you are."

"Shucks, boy! You couldn't drag me in with a hawser. I helped you make port, as one friend to another, but this lets me out."

The secretary escorted Stannard into the executive offices, and left him to wait in an anteroom. It was an hour before he was summoned into the presence of the lean, slightly stooping man, with the keenly intelligent face and pugnacious jaw, who was, in name and in fact, the ruler of the greatest of nations. The incisive voice was shaded with kindliness as he said:

"Please be seated, Mr. Stannard. You look very tired. There is no need to tell you that this is a confidential interview. I have examined the documents with care. I have no doubt of their genuineness, but I must know, of course, how you obtained them."

Stannard told him, and he told the story well, without elaboration. It was convincing as it stood, and there were witnesses who could be sent for, Dave, the cook at the life-saving station, Dan Quillman and his wife, Miss Nancy Veeder, and Harry Gray.

"I shall not bring them into the matter, Mr. Stannard," said the president. "You have told me the truth. I am compelled to believe every word of it. Your motive vouches for you. More than I can tell you, I appreciate what you have done for your country. And I am sorry, indeed, that I can give you no public reward or recognition. You understand, do you not?"

"Perfectly, Mr. President. To be thanked by you is a reward big enough to be passed on to my grandchildren. You mean that these documents must be kept under cover, for your own private information?"

"For my information, and that of the secretary of state, Mr. Stannard. I shall make prompt use of their contents, in a special message to Congress on the Mexican situation, but I must carefully guard the source. There is—er—a flaw in my title, as there was in yours. But you and I are concerned with the common good."

"These interests that are implicated must have been active here in Washington," said Stannard. "And they have lined up a good many powerful newspapers."

"I suspected. Now I know. That is the weapon which you have placed in my hand," was the earnest reply. "It has been a graver issue than"—he checked himself and finished—"than the country realizes. You have risked your life to serve. These documents are far more valuable to me than you can have surmised. I am able to read some things between the lines that would escape you. These credentials to persons abroad, to agents who represent interests not wholly financial——"

"A foreign alliance with Mexico against our country?" quickly exclaimed Stannard, speaking before he thought.

"That is your own inference, Mr. Stannard," was the diplomatic response. "I will say that forewarned is forearmed. You have equipped me with information of the greatest possible value

at a time when our relations with Mexico are particularly critical. I think you may safely tell those hypothetical grandchildren that your valor and patriotism assisted the President of the United States to avert a wicked and calamitous war."

"They will be proud of grandpop," cried Stannard, with a boyish laugh. The ruler's face, weary and lined with care, brightened with something of Stannard's spirit as he exclaimed:

"And I haven't even asked whether their presumptive grandpop is a Democrat. What you deserve is a special medal of honor. As for the secret-service fund of the treasury department, I don't propose to spoil and cheapen that fine deed of yours——"

"You are quite right, Mr. President," replied Stannard, his eyes suffused with feeling. "I can't afford to spoil it. I didn't play the game for a reward."

"You ought to receive one, but we agree that it is impossible," reluctantly resumed the president.

"If you will shake hands and thank me again, I shall feel richer than the Westheim Brothers, the Maxwell Syndicate, and the rest of that bunch."

It was thus they parted, Stannard walking on air. He had fought it through to the finish. Worry about his job? He had come to grips with life, and he was unafraid of it. Jubilantly, he rejoined Dan Quillman, that shrinking hero who found his delight in friendship.

"I guess you're glad Miramar's knife didn't make you cave in," said the pilot. "It sounds hard, Fred, but I'd have sooner seen you dead than a quitter."

"I have a whole lot to live for," cried Stannard. "And I expect to see *her* tomorrow."

"And you can look her straight in the eye, boy. If she marries you, she gets a man."

Nancy Veeder was of the same opinion next morning. Not at all surprised by his uncanny return from Jamaica, she asked many eager questions, now laughing, again wiping her eyes. She was expecting something more, and the wonderful surmise came true when Stannard said, with that gentle, half-wistful smile of his:

"The third attempt was to be the real thing as a proposal, Nancy dear. This is it. I could make it more finished in writing, but I couldn't love you any more."

"It needs no editing as it is," was the sweet candor of her response. "I am perfectly satisfied, only *why* did you hesitate those other times? I began to think I should have to propose to you. Weren't you sure you wanted me?"

"The surest thing in the world," he told her. "But before I really asked you, I had to make good. And I was worried about having a job, but that doesn't seem to matter a rap."

"Of course not, Fred. Let Beatrice Clare disapprove as much as she likes. Oh, why can't we both resign from the *Tribune* right now?" and Nancy clasped her hands. "The pace is wearing you out. There are plenty of news getters, but so few men who can really write. It is your gift, the divine spark is there, and you must not let it flicker out."

"I resign, Nancy? Bless your heart, I have automatically fired myself. My next interview with J. R. Estabrook will be in the nature of a fatal explosion. Can you see me saunter in to tell him that I have trimmed him at his own game, and delivered the goods at the White House?"

"Let me go with you, Fred," she coaxed. "We will offer a joint resignation, quick. Why can't we find a little place in the country where you can write stories? And, perhaps, I can get the Beatrice Clare stuff to do at home. We are not going to starve."

Her lovely faith in the future, their future together, was irresistible, but he

must first square accounts with the present.

"You go with me to see J. R.?" he drawled. "I fear it would not be a proper scene for a lady. There might be language. He is—er—vigorous at times."

"Then I refuse to let you go alone, Fred. Why should you be scolded and abused when you have behaved like a hero?"

"Signs of a deadlock already, Nancy," was his cheerful comment. "Supposing I write him a letter, and you indorse it with your own fair hand as my managing editor for life? I ought to sing some sort of a swan song. The *Tribune* has been pretty decent to me."

Stannard fished out a sheet of copy paper and a pencil, and scribbled a rough draft as follows:

MY DEAR MR. ESTABROOK: I inclose one first-class excursion ticket to Jamaica by steamer *Dorinda,* with my cordial thanks for your kindness in providing me with same. To revamp the adage—there's many a slip 'twixt the wharf and the trip. In this instance I slipped ashore and you slipped up. It was necessary for reasons of state. I shall not state the reasons except to inform you that I beat Captain William Marmaduke Mannice to it. The documents are where they will do the most good to the greatest number. The president seemed pleased with them, although they say he is a hard man to please.

It really doesn't seem worth while for me to return to the *Tribune,* as you can do nothing else than snatch my perfectly good job from under me. In losing it, I quit a winner. You dealt the cards, my dear sir, and I filled my hand on the draw. General Miramar is feeling poorly, but my health is greatly improved, without going to sea.

Stannard glanced up and chewed the end of his pencil before he sweetly inquired:

"Will that hold him, do you think? Now, Nancy mine, we turn to matters of real importance. What was that you said about a little place in the country with no jobs to lose?"

"It is what all sensible people dream about, Fred, but few have the courage to seek it."

"I have it," said he. "A house at Lewes, right alongside Dan and his wife. There is one for rent, all furnished. It would seem like heaven, just us two, down among the honest mariners. Try it? Of course, we'll try it. The newspaper game *has* become a trifle wearing."

"But are you sure you can keep out of the game?" she anxiously asked him.

"I am safe unless I cross the trail of another combination like General Rodigro Miramar and Captain Bill Mannice. Then I am liable to put on my war bonnet and look for trouble."

"You may be hard to handle, Fred Stannard," adoringly quoth Nancy. "But, my goodness, I am *that* proud of you."

"I pulled off that stunt for the sake of our grandchildren," was his audacious reply.

While the war drum throbs in Europe men are riding through the forest, across the sage flats and the lava beds and the grass lands of the West, keeping watch over the cattle on a thousand hills, singing their cowboy songs, and hearing no whisper of the music of a distant drum. It is of these that B. M. Bower writes in a book-length novel called "The Spook Hills Mystery" which will be printed complete in the next POPULAR. A great novel, one of the best that Bower has written.

The Fate Chaser

By Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "An Amateur War Lord," "Cephas the Paladin," Etc.

The flight of Halil Ben Ismail from the bazaars of Syria to the bazaars of the Pan-Universal Exposition in America to escape from Azrael, the angel of death. A noteworthy story of a Mohammedan's experience in the land of the infidel. A tale that will cheat you of a tear and tease you to a smile.

NOW," intoned the bazaar minstrel, right whiningly, "it was granted unto Rustun Ali, the sheik, to see in a dream the throne of Allah the just.

"And he beheld and saw Allah call unto Him Azrael, the angel of death.

"And Allah spake unto Azrael, the angel of death, saying:

"'Arise and gird on thy sword; and, on the eighth day, smite Rustun Ali, the sheik. And thou shalt——'

"But Rustun Ali, the sheik, did abide to hear no more. He awoke in icy fear.

"And he delayed not to set his house in order, but cast his garment over his head and fled northward into the wilderness from the city of Helron; wherein was his dwelling.

"For eight days ran he northward and stayed not; fleeing ever to escape the sword of Azrael, the angel of death.

"And on the eighth day he came unto the city of Damascus. And he was sore spent. Yet he was glad of heart. For oft had he looked behind him. And not once had he seen Azrael, the angel of death, pursuing.

"And as Rustun Ali, the sheik, entered the city of Damascus, lo! before him in the southern gateway stood Azrael, the angel of death. And Azrael said unto him:

"'Oh, Rustun Ali, the sheik, it is well that you are come hither at the appointed hour. For it was here, at the gateway of Damascus, that Allah the just bade me smite thee.'

"Which sheweth, O illustrious ones," concluded the minstrel, "that no man may——"

But Halil Ben Ismaïl did not wait to hear the neatly pointed moral of the chant. He strode out from the cool shade of the bazaar street; his scarlet slippers slopping, unheeded, through the muck of the narrow roadway.

Fear was at Halil Ben Ismaïl's heart. And the singsong tale he had just heard had set his dread to throbbing; as a bit of barley sugar might stir to fresh anguish an aching tooth.

Three days earlier—yes, and for as many years before that as he had lived—Halil had deemed himself the luckiest of men. From the terrace of his house on the hillside that overlooked the busy harbor of Jaffa he had gazed forth across the blue waters daily; toward far-off Europe, land of barbarian and infidel; and had felt that no man in Jaffa or in that unknown world

beyond the west was more fortunate than he.

For he had youth and moderate wealth and an ancient name; and he had made the pilgrimage and—so far as a grown man and a shereef might deign to be—he was very much in love.

He loved the maid whose father's gardens adjoined his own: Ayesha, daughter of Ilderim, the banker. She was fair and she was wise. She had gone to school at the Christian mission for two entire years; albeit the Prophet, in the second chapter of Al-Koran, cautions believers against permitting women to learn the written word.

And, once as Ayesha had walked in the walled garden at sunset, Halil had heard her sing. Braving death were he discovered, he had climbed the olive tree that grew against the wall and he had dropped down upon the far side. Not once but three times had he and Ayesha spoken face to face; there in her father's garden.

A shameless and brazen procedure, forsooth—even though Halil had not so much as touched the hem of her *Kumbaz*—and one that the well-born maid could never have permitted had not the wicked mission taught its pupils that women have souls and rights.

For which Halil Ben Ismaïl blessed the mission; albeit he feared lest so impious a blessing might carry in its wake a curse from Allah, the just, to himself.

And, now ——

Two days earlier, Halil had summoned a wekeel—official go-between—to beg of Ilderim, the banker, the hand of Ayesha. And, after a scant twelve hours of bargaining, the banker—who knew and honored the family of Halil—had given consent.

Moreover—not aware that the twain had met and spoken by stealth—he had fixed the dower at a mere eighteen hundred medjidie. And in that land, where the groom, not the bride, pays dowry, so reasonable a sum for so fair a maid was true generosity.

Halil in his first boundless joy had wandered forth under the stars, that he might be alone for a space with this great, deep happiness of his. Far had he walked; the night wind in his face, the white stars above him. Far out among the olive hills that lie behind Jaffa.

And there, at midnight, he had chanced upon a man who was riding, and riding hard, to the city. The man, seeing Halil alone and far from the walls, and noting in the starlight his rich dress, had drawn a bell-mouthed pistol and had demanded the lover's purse and his rings.

And Halil, angered that his gold dreams should be so roughly interrupted, had in a gust of rage cast caution to the dogs and had struck out full fiercely with the stout *nabout* staff he carried.

The blow had taken the robber by surprise; so that he had had time neither to pull trigger nor to dodge. Full on his frontal bone the *nabout's* knob had crashed. And down from the saddle into the white road he had pitched, like a tossed grain bag.

Then, by light of tinder box and steel, Halil had looked to see what manner of thief this might be who had attacked him on the open way. He had pushed back the concealing Kaffiyeh folds from the robber's face. And then the tinder box had fallen forgotten into the white dust.

For the man was a Bedouin. A Bedouin, too, from his dress, of the Beyt Ammah, a tribe that feared neither Allah nor Allah's mortal children. Moreover, the Bedouin was very evidently slain. For his jaw was dropped and his breath was sped.

The fact that he had slain a thief who would blithely have slain him had not at all troubled Halil Ben Ismaïl. But that the victim chanced to be of

Beyt Ammah had set his heart aquiver like jelly. For, even more than usual among the Bedouins, did the Beyt Ammah men hold fiercely sacred the blood-atonement law of their ancestors.

When a man of their tribe fell, in time of peace, and at the hand of an outsider, it was the sworn duty of every man, woman, and child of the Beyt Ammah to avenge that death. Yes, even to tracing the slayer, if need be, a hundred miles or more. By the score were piled up the windy chronicles of such vengeance hunts. And in all the roster there was scarce one record of failure to secure the blood atonement.

Wherefore, Halil Ben Ismaïl had gone sick and trembled; though commonly he was a brave man. He had laid his hand above the bare heart of the Bedouin. To his shaking touch the body already seemed to be cooling. Assuredly Halil could catch no feeling of heartbeat. The head, too, was bent oddly far to one side. The neck——

In panic, Halil had fled down the road whence he had come.

For a full mile he had run. There was a chance, perhaps, that the killing might not be traced to him. But seldom did a Bedouin ride alone on so long a journey as from the Beyt Ammah country to Jaffa. And doubtless the others of the dead man's tribe were not far behind. Soon they would come upon their comrade's body. Halil must be safe at home, with no trace of his passing, before they could come up with him. And his run had become a frenzied rush.

Suddenly he had halted and had turned back upon his tracks, still at top speed. For he remembered.

He had remembered the tinder box. The embossed silver-and-shell box on whose cover was graven the characters of his name; a name known well throughout Jaffa.

He had dropped it from his nerveless fingers when he had seen who his victim was. He had dropped it there in the road beside the body, and—fool of a thousand fools!—he had given it no second thought.

Had he written out his name on parchment and pinned it to the dead Bedouin's chest, he could scarce have left a stronger clew for the next-of-kin avengers to follow.

They had but to ride into Jaffa and ask at the first shop: "Who is Halil Ben Ismaïl and where abides he?" Unless—unless——

There had been one chance in three that the slain man had been riding far enough in advance of his fellows to allow of Halil's reaching his body before they could come up. And that chance Halil had taken.

He had reached the scene of his meeting with the Bedouin. It was the same place. There could be no doubt. For even by the faint starshine Halil could see the imprint of the sprawling body in the dust.

But the body itself was gone. So was the lean desert horse that Halil had left cropping thorn shoots at the roadside.

So was the silver-and-shell tinder box.

All were gone. Halil, on hands and knees, had groped frantically, for a radius of ten yards, for the box. But to no avail.

He dared not wait longer. He understood enough of Bedouin ways to know what had befallen. The dead man's fellows had arrived—a few of them—had found the body in the road; had searched for a clew to the slayer; had found that, too, with ridiculous ease; and, carrying their comrade, had ridden back to meet the others of their party who were coming on more slowly.

Forgetting his fatigue, Halil Ben Ismaïl had gathered up the skirts of his robe and had fled. Nor had he paused until he was within his own hill-

side house—the house whose rambling garden adjoined Ayesha's.

There, for hours, he had sat—waiting. At dawn they might come. Or, if they feared the pasha's hand in punishment, they would bide their time and come by stealth at an hour when their vengeance could be wreaked in safety. It might be in a minute. It might be in a week.

It was hard to die when one was young and rich. Very hard to die when one loved, and was loved. And Halil had to call on all his Eastern fatalism to sustain him.

But when two days passed, and his foes still waited, the gnawing fear was whipped into action by waxing wrath.

He had done no crime. He had but struck to save his own life. He had not meant to slay. And yet he must crouch in his house, like a felon in his cell, waiting to be killed. It was not fair, nor to be endured.

Halil walked abroad and boldly entered the bazaars as was his morning wont.

Inshallah! Let death meet him in the open, if it would. And in the open, as he paused, attracted by the droning of a minstrel, the song of Rustun Ali, the sheik, was sung into his straining ears. The song of the dreamer who fled to escape death, and who, fleeing, ran upon the death angel's very sword. It was not a chant to put cheer into a doomed man's heart.

Halil strode down the zigzag alleyway leading from the bazaars to the sea. He had no definite aim in view. But fear goaded him onward. Anything was better than to stand still, there in the bazaar shadows; whence at any moment a darker shadow might glide forward and drive a curved Bedouin knife into his back.

Down the steep alley he hurried, toward the patch of shingle at its foot. There he halted. In front of him lay the blue harbor, shark-infested and smilingly treacherous—perhaps the most treacherous, uncertain harbor along all the Syrian coast. A half mile to the left was the long jetty; a half mile out from shore the crazy black breakwater, with its wave-polished mass of rock teeth.

Just within the breakwater lay a big Feringi sail ship; her queer-dressed crew—womanishly beardless for the most part, and with their white skins only slightly tanned—busy on the decks. Some of them were hauling at some meaningless-looking ropes. And as they hauled, they were singing in rough, rumbling voices a still more meaningless Feringi song.

Halil had gone as a lad to Al-Azhar in Cairo and had mastered more than a smattering of the queer Feringi tongue. Yet, though the words came distinct to him across the still water, they made scant sense. He assumed that the chant was a Feringi sea prayer; and fell idly to listening:

There's tinkers an' tailors an' sojers an' all——
Weigh ho! Roll a man down!
What ship as good seamen aboard the *Black Ball*—
Give us a chance to roll a man down!

Yes, no doubt a prayer to one of their gods. And Halil grimly hoped the god might understand its sense better than did he.

Come all ye bold topmen an' listen to me—
Weigh ho! Roll a——

"Allah, the all merciful, will repay thee, O prince!" interrupted a droning voice at Halil's elbow. "May Allah and His Prophet preserve thee and add to thy hoard! Have pity upon the sufferer! What says the Book?—'To give alms to the afflicted is to receive the key to paradise.' I am afflicted, O rich man who art handsome as Omar. Baksheesh!"

Halil turned; tossed a piaster in the general direction of a fat beggar who, in passing, had made a professional

pause to break in on the doomed man's musings; then turned away again. But almost at once he wheeled, gripping his *nabout* more tightly, and faced toward the petitioner. Might not the beggar perhaps be—— But no. The plump mendicant had picked up the piaster and was waddling on toward the alley-way that led up to the bazaars.

Halil, ashamed of his own fear, turned back toward the ship. It was bitter and shameful to fear thus the face of man. Then, out of stress, was born his idea:

This Feringi vessel was making ready to weigh anchor. Doubtless to cross to some of the barbarous, far-off Feringi lands; distant lands where even the Beyt Ammah's revenge could not hope to follow.

Halil's problem was solved. He ran up the hill as lightly as a boy, and into the stall of his bankers. A half hour later, all his available funds in his belt, he was back at the beach and hailing a passing rowboat.

Along the Street of a Thousand Laughs strolled Halil Ben Ismaïl. He liked the Street of a Thousand Laughs better than any other section of the Pan-Universal Exposition. For sometimes when night had risen—not fallen, but *risen*, in the flare of a myriad flaring lights, to an accompaniment of fifty bands—sometimes when night had risen, especially Saturday night, the Street of a Thousand Laughs reminded him of the busiest of Jaffa bazaar days.

The noise, the jostling, the numberless shuffling feet, the uncountable odors, the babel of joy-rough voices, the raucous yells of the barkers—all blended into a single mighty chord. A chord hideous to the Occidental non-reveler's senses; inexpressibly homelike to this exile from the land where noise and multitudinous smells are synonyms for gayety.

From soap boxes and stands in front of gilt-and-electric-light "attractions," brass-lunged men were roaring the marvels of their shows. In an elevated cage in front of a canvas-front booth, a hairy wild man, burrowed in straw, clanked his chains and gibbered with a southern Louisiana accent.

Hot dog, popcorn, and salt-water taffy scented the air. Ball-throwing stands and shooting galleries lent the babel chorus a continuous staccato subtone. Ghastly green-lit photo galleries, red-bulbed dance pavilions, blue-windowed concert halls added color to the eternal glare of white lights.

City folk, country folk, shopgirls, boys of all sizes and costumes—every sort of seeker for cheap and loud fun—jammed the sidewalks and the narrow middle way.

Over all brooded the solemn, stifling night of summer, that made people stop every now and then and gasp for air; that transformed stiff collars, at a moistly magic touch, to limp cloths.

To Halil Ben Ismaïl, official interpreter for the Cairo quarter, a furlong distant, the air was but balmy; the racket was pleasingly reminiscent; the indescribable reek of odors was a trifle insipid.

But on the whole Halil rather liked the Street of a Thousand Laughs. Of a certainty he disliked it infinitely less than anything else in this bleak, barbarous, gray-lived America which had become his unloving and unloved land of refuge.

America contained and represented everything Halil did not like. But at least it was the last spot on the face of the earth whither the Bedouins of the Beyt Ammah might be reasonably expected to wander in pursuit of a blood quest.

It was hard to imagine such a possibility. And Fear no longer crept whispering at Halil Ben Ismaïl's elbow; nor, sharing his pillow, mouthed

its bugaboo horror in his ear, through the long nights.

In fact, his dread was just strong enough, together with its twin sister Prudence, to make bearable his homesick hatred for the Western World and to hold in leash his craving to go back to his house on the Jaffa hillside—the pleasant stucco house whose garden adjoined Ayesha's.

But, though the ten months of his absence had been as a century to him, the absentee, yet he knew full well that it was as a mere day in the sum of a Bedouin tribesman's hate. News, in Syria—even in anterailroad, antetelegraph Syria—flew fast. And the Beyt Ammah folk had many friends in Jaffa. Friends who, knowing their blood quest, would be quick to apprise them of the much-sought slayer's return from across the world.

So on stayed Halil in the land of his loathing. Nor did he dare make known his whereabouts by sending to his bankers for the accrued boat rents which formed, customarily, his livelihood. He had drawn his ready cash, it is true, when he left Syria. And to him, at the time, the sum had seemed well-nigh enough to keep him at ease for years.

But in this land of pasty faces and growl-deep voices—in this land where even the best-clad men carried no belt knives, and where merchants neglected to shriek in falsetto when they bargained—in this America, money melted like summer snow on Mount Hermon.

At even the lowest inns, a room with a bed could scarce be had for a day and night for less than a half dollar—ten or twelve full piasters, five-eighths of a whole medjidie. A man's meal in a street khan cost no less than five piasters—and for vile, overcooked meat, at that; without a single drop of deliciously greasy oil or one pinch of barley sugar on it.

Then, to ride in one of their horseless rail wagons, for even a scant four miles or so, meant the squandering of another piaster. As for their places of amusement—the cheapest and poorest of their magic picture shows cost more than at home would a long blissful evening of coffee and nargile; brightened by the best tales of a coffee-house story-teller. As for clothes—ten precious silver dollars had his present outfit cost.

Small wonder that Halil's rich savings had taken wings and that, on the verge of starvation, he had availed himself with tearful joy of the chance to act as interpreter for the aggregation of despised donkey boys and Nile fellahin calling itself the Cairo quarter, at the Pan-Universal!

Twelve dollars a week—prince's wage!—and food and shelter. Already he had laid by enough money to go home—if he dared; which he did not.

Halil Ben Ismaïl sauntered along the Street of a Thousand Laughs on this July Saturday night, comforting his homesick heart with the heat, the noise, the smell. He prided himself, too, that in his new fashionable and well-cut Occidental clothes, he was easily passing muster as an American of wealth, high birth, and even of title.

His frock coat, it is true, had been constructed for a considerably larger man; and his wide-checked white-and-black trousers had been once intended to grace the legs of a man far leaner—a minstrel end man whose show had gone to pieces, as a Pan-Universal attraction, before he could pay his tailor.

The red slippers, too—ever the dress shoe of the Syrian as the frock coat is his ideal of European elegance—were a trifle conspicuous. As were the scarlet flannel vest with its brass buttons and the furry high hat whose sweatband was generously papered to make it fit.

But the general effect, Halil knew, was wholly desirable and up to date.

His costume, taken all in all, was such as an American emir's son might be expected to wear. It elicited glances and even smiles from more than one passing shopgirl. Halil settled his sky-blue tie more straight at such moments and swung his rattan cane more jauntily between his yellow-gloved fingers.

It was good to be handsome and to be fashionably attired. It was pleasant to be the recipient of smiles even from these chalk-faced Feringi maids. It momentarily made the yearning for Ayesha a little less bitter.

"Hey, Ismale! Oh, Benny Ismale!" yelled Bogan, half proprietor of the Trip to Mars, as Halil Ben Ismaïl moved past the Martian attraction's doors.

Halil stopped; glad to be hailed by an acquaintance, in this Street of a Thousand Laughs and a Million Strangers. He had a nodding acquaintance with Bogan, who was a friend of the Cairo quarter's manager. So he turned in from the throng to the little semi-enclosed space at one side of the Trip to Mars entrance.

"Salutations, O Bogan," Halil observed, in carefully acquired American idiom. "May peace be to you and to your children's children!"

"Same here," returned Bogan. "Only I'm a bachelor. But thanks just the same. Want to earn half an iron man, Benny? Fifty cents," he translated, as Ben Ismaïl looked puzzled.

"Of a sure," gladly answered Halil.

"I'm sorry to butt in if you're hurrying to fill a date," joshed Bogan, eying the gaudy costume.

"I should become worried!" retorted Halil gayly.

Bogan turned to a stout, very bald man at his side.

"Higgs," said he, "shake hands with my friend, Mr. Benjamin Ismale, of the Cairo quarter. Ismale's the interpreter over there. He can help us out if any one can."

Mr. Higgs acknowledged the introduction and announcement with a courteous grunt.

"You see, Benny," pursued Bogan, "it's like this: Mr. Higgs owns a part interest in our Trip to Mars. He was down to New York yesterday. And over to Ellis Island he come across an Egyptian or a Hindu or some other kind of heathen—no offense to you, Benny—that had come across as a stowaway and had been held up for deporting."

"Of a certainty, O Bogan, effendi," assented Halil as Bogan paused a moment to relight a frayed cigar.

"Well," went on Bogan, "this was a picturesque guy; with his funny brown face and the Oriental dewdads he was wearing, and all that. So Higgs here gets a notion he'd make kind of a hit somewhere in our show. As the Man from Mars, or something like that."

"I perceive," said Halil, who did not at all.

"So Higgs pays his thirty dollars entrance fee to the United States and his four-dollar alien tax, and brings him up here. Now that he's here, we can't make him understand a thing. Naples Mike has tried him in three languages—or lingoes Mike says are languages; they sound more like gargles, to me—and Naowa's tried him on the sign language. No go. No savvy. And he squats inside there in a cubby-hole in the dark, looking about as wise as a stewed tripe and not doing a thing for his board and keep except keening a kind of wurra-wurra dirge in his own tongue. Come in and look him over, won't you, and talk to him in Cairo or Egyptian or something? Maybe you can make him understand what we want him to do."

"He cannot talk words? He possesses no verbiage?" asked Halil as he started obediently toward the gate, convoyed by Bogan and Higgs.

"Oh, he talks all right," Higgs re-

assured him. "Only he don't say nothin'. He's spent most of the evenin' squattin' there in his corner chantin' that fun'ral march singsong of his."

"A lament. A lamentation," pronounced Halil, as, passing through the gate, he caught muffled fragments of familiar sound from within.

"It's a lamentation, all right," agreed Bogan. "Worse'n any lamentation that seven cats in an alley could make. He's been at it for an hour, now. D'ye s'pose he's sick?"

"No," decided Halil. "But he is far from home. It is the manner of the folk in my world to voice thus their grief. It calms. I myself when first I boarded your heavenlike country——"

He paused. Both in speech and in steps. From around the corner of a partition directly in front of him came in sustained, if husky, tones a minor chant; rising now and again to a sustained howl, only to scale down to a groan. It was the accent of the Lament Song; familiar to every one who has pierced the outer tourist crust of the East.

The joy of hearing once more his own beloved Arabic—purest of Syrian Arabic at that—held Halil Ben Ismaïl spellbound.

"Ohé! Aiai!" came the droning dirge from beyond the partition corner. "Stout of heart as a desert lion, and beauteous of face and form as the angels of Allah and the crest of Hermon, was Nasif Abou-Najib. Proud was he as was Ali, the khaleef, of old. Proud and strong and of noble lineage! *Ohé! Mashallah!* Behold him now!"

"What's the old guy blitherin' about?" demanded Higgs.

Halil translated.

"Who's he talkin' about?" asked Higgs. "Who's the person that's like lions and angels and——"

"It is him himself," explained Halil.

"H'm! He's changed a whole lot, then, since the last time he looked in the glass," was Higgs' comment. "What's he singin' his own charms for, in that fool way? Tryin' to make a hit with himself?"

"No. It is custom. It is portion of the lamentation. It is the manner, universally, of lamentations. Listen! He says—he says: 'Lo, I was as an emir—yea, as a sultan of earth and sky. And I was the—what you call hero—the hero of all the sons of Islam. None was like to me in fame, in wealth, in valor, in beauty.'"

"It's easy to see the old heathen hates himself like poison," observed Bogan. "Listen! He's at it again."

The rumbling voice, after ceasing for an instant, wailed forth raucously once more:

"And on this black day, where is Nasif Abou-Najib, the glorious? Far from his fatherland! Afar in the country of the infidel. A landless man. Lo, Nasif Abou-Najib hath slain a man in his wrath. A low-born man, whose next of kin swore the blood oath and who pursued, even with the soldiers of the pasha—on whom be the red curse of Gehenna!—so that Abou-Najib fled for his life. Yea, to the land of the Feringi—to the bourne of the red-haired and godless!"

"You see, Mr. Ismale," Higgs was explaining as Halil, a thrill of sympathy for a fellow fear slave gripping him, was about to round the thin partition wall, "you see, it was like this: I picked up a little of his story from the immigration people. He stowed away on an India-bound ship at some port over in Egypt or Syria; pretty near a year ago. The captain dug him out and made him work his passage. First thing when they struck India, he saw a feller from his own land on the wharf; and he wouldn't go ashore. Not even when the ship was laid up for repairs for three or four months. Lived in the hold all the time, and did odd paint jobs and rust pounding for his

keep. Seemed to be scared of something."

"Yes," said Halil positively. "He was affrighted. I know."

"Then when the ship stopped at his own port on the way west, the captain had him run ashore. But they'd no sooner got past Port Said than they found he'd stowed away again. So they brought him on and left him at Ellis Island. Chase around to him now, won't you, and do some translating?"

Halil, in three steps, had turned the corner and found himself at the doorless opening of a rubbish cupboard. There, in one end of the closet, half invisible in the dim light of the recess, huddled the robed and ragged figure of a man.

"Naharak sai'd!" greeted Halil. *"Alcikum salaam!"*

The figure ceased rocking to and fro and rose from its recumbent posture.

"Naharak assad!" duly returned the lament singer. "And may peace be to you multiplied, and may you lie where rose leaves shall fall upon your tomb, O you who in the land of devils speak with the tongue of the Prophet's sons!"

"May the Compassionate ordain a couch of silk and gold for you in paradise, O brother of eagles!" said Halil. "And may your children be sultans! What do you here, far from the home of our fathers?"

"I slew a man and I fled from the avengers," replied Abou-Najib, as simply as if he were recounting the tale of a minor error of judgment. "I fled, for they were strengthened by the pasha's troops, and my tribe could not protect me, nor was the whole desert wide enough to hide me from so many pursuers."

"And that is why——"

"I fled my country. I would I had stayed and perished on the Prophet's soil."

Halil, in silent sympathy, stretched forth a handful of yellow cigarettes. First touching his own breast and forehead with his long fingers, Abou-Najib eagerly accepted the entire handful. Sticking one cigarette in his mouth, he pouched the rest; then, with the universal smoker gesture, he groped in the breast of his robe.

Halil, divining what the man sought, fished out a card of matches. He was vastly proud of his new-found familiarity with so marvelous and intricate a novelty as a safety match. And, as much to air that familiarity as to give the refugee a light, he struck a match on the card's strip of prepared surface.

At the same instant, Abou-Najib found what he had been seeking. The match flare illumined every corner of the tiny cubby-hole. It showed in detail the ragged figure of a desert Bedouin who was just drawing from his robe's bosom a little tarnished box.

A silver-and-shell box of odd workmanship; whereon, in Arabic characters, a name was engraved.

The match fell from Halil's stiffening fingers to the floor, leaving the two men in what seemed a denser darkness than before.

"That box!" croaked Halil, finding voice as the Bedouin struck flint and steel. "How came you by it, O offspring of fifty thousand justly punished grave robbers and murderers?"

Abou-Najib, in no wise resenting the mildly discourteous wording of the query, made chuckling reply.

"In just payment for a cracked head. As I rode in flight to Jaffa from my own country of the Beyt Ammah, to take ship, I met by night a man who looked as though his purse might speed my journey. But when I would have taken it, he smote me to the ground with his staff. I woke to find he had fled. Yea, the fool had not alone fled without robbing me, but had left—this! He——"

"Oh, Nasif Abou-Najib!" broke in Halil, his voice cracked and high-

pitched in a delirium of incredulous joy. "Thy rightful tomb will be in the body of hog or vulture! And I would hasten thy journey to that fit resting place! Were it not that thou hast just lifted Azrael's black wing from before mine eye. Knowest thou the tale of Rustun Ali, the sheik, who fled on an eight-day journey to escape the sword of the death angel, and who, at his journey's end, found the angel awaiting him?

"Folk mistell that tale. It should end: 'And the angel was none but a ragged Bedouin murderer who must eke out his days in a far land, while his victim returneth to Allah's most blessed country by the earliest boat.' *Ma-Salaam-i,* O brother to the herd of Gaddarene swine! Many have raced with Fear. But few save Halil Ben Ismaïl have passed him by.

"Farewell—and take the loving blessings of the fool who neglected to rob thee. Ayesha is waiting for me!"

Solemnly but fervently, Halil Ben Ismaïl removed his furry high hat from his head. Yet more solemnly and fervently he placed it on the concrete floor and drove his slippered heel through it. Next he ripped off the frock coat that an hour earlier had seemed to him the desired acme of fashion. Snatching the torn burnoose from Nasif Abou-Najib's shoulders and tossing there his frock coat in its stead, he wound the burnoose folds around his own body and strode forth into the Street of a Thousand Laughs.

"I no longer look so like a native and inhereditary American that none would guess me foreign born," was all he would vouchsafe to the wondering and questioning Bogan and Higgs as he swept past them on his way out. "And as for the half of an iron gentleman that you pledged to give me to interpret, you may lavish it on Nasif Abou-Najib. I grudge it not for him. For, what says your Feringi proverb speech:

" 'It is a sick wind that blows when nobody is good. So thieves fall out of it. And honesty becomes the best politics.' I am going *home!*"

SOME CANDIDATE!

THE Honorable James Hamilton Lewis, now a United States senator from Illinois, and always the best dresser in this or any other country, has had a career variegated, punctuated, starred, and made picturesque by the number of political things he has run for in various parts of the country. Here are some of them:

Candidate for governor of Washington State in 1892; nominee for United States senator from Washington in 1894; presented by Washington State as candidate for vice-presidential nomination in 1896; caucus nominee for United States senator from the State of Washington in 1899; indorsed by the Pacific Coast States for the Democratic vice presidency in 1900; elected to the territorial senate of Washington; member of Congress at large from the State of Washington from 1897 until 1899; corporation counsel for the city of Chicago from 1905 to 1907; now in the United States Senate.

Taking it all in all, this ought to be enough to entitle the Honorable "Jim Ham" to do as he does do—that is, to sit in a Washington theater fully garbed in evening dress, not to mention cuff links and shirt studs that match his pink whiskers, and to stroke those whiskers with an air which convinces you that he is as wise as Rhadamanthus and equal to all statesmanship problems.

Renton's Code

By Allan Sullivan

Author of "John Strong, Civil Engineer," Etc.

Following the opening of the Panama Canal there will be many rivals for Western trade. Here is an engineer's story in which the passions of men associated with the Trans-Pacific and the Inter-Oceanic Railroads surge amid the scented solitudes of Bottleneck Pass.

RENTON straddled a log on the edge of a ravine and stared back over the purple distance. Below him glinted the survey tents, and eastward marched the feathery tops of that wilderness they had been traversing for weeks. Westward swelled a rounded hill, and beyond it heaved the vast flanks of the mountains, up whose ridges the shadows now crept toward the pink-serrated tops. On the other side of the hill was the entrance to Bottleneck Pass. To this cleft the survey of the Transpacific had been pressing insistently on. It dominated access to the sea.

Somewhere in this scented solitude another survey party was hidden. It hastened southward under urgent orders from the Interoceanic: rivals with the Transpacific for Western trade that must inevitably follow the opening of the Panama Canal. Ahead of them both waited Bottleneck Pass. Along that narrow gorge the first comer, and the first only, would have right of way. A thousand feet soared its perpendicular walls. At the bottom, with a minimum grade, a single track might corkscrew along. For the next comer there was nothing but to burrow for miles through the granite feet of snow-capped mountains.

All this had drilled into Renton's brain. Braithwaite, the engineer in charge, had talked of nothing else. Renton often felt he overdid it, for in the wilderness a man's mind is prone to turn inward. But just now his thoughts vaulted—three thousand miles from the Bottleneck to Hester McDougall. Always at sunset and sunrise he accomplished this transmigration. Two months ago they had said good-by, and to Renton there had come an exquisite prompting that behind the shadows in Hester's eyes there had lurked an ineffable something he had awaited for months. It seemed at first a far cry from a transit man to the daughter of the president of the Transpacific. But of late things had gone well. He found himself transferred from job to job, and it was always a step up. He wondered if there were a power behind the throne. The stars jumped at him as he slid downward toward camp. Braithwaite, a tall, lean man with a crooked mouth and evasive eyes, was posing over a portable table and plotting curves. The mosquitoes came at him in clouds, and his plan was dotted irregularly with small red, vivid patches.

He looked up as Renton entered. "How much did you get in to-day?"

"Two miles."

"Blast the flies! Maximum curve?"

"Six degrees—might flatten it a bit."

Braithwaite swung his dividers. "I make it about eight miles to go to the entrance. Once there we're safe. I reckon we ought to make it in three days—understand—we've got to make it." His jaw thrust out. He looked predatory and aggressive.

Renton nodded. He was rather weary of it, and to-night Hester seemed farther away.

They ate in silence, for the woods demand but few words. After supper he smoked stolidly, peering into the fire, building castles that would not stay up, feeling a flood of strange, untranslatable desires encompassing his strong young body. Then he rolled himself in his blankets and turned his face to the wall of the tent. The last thing he saw was Braithwaite, who seemed to be poring over a calendar and making computations.

Three days later he squinted through his transit down a long, narrow gash in the heavy timber that clothed the first rise of the foothills. The survey line looked like an angry wound in the soft, dark breast of the forest. The white and yellow fiber of slashed trees was empearled with slow drops of glistening gum, and shone with sharp distinction against these brown depths. At the far end miniature figures swung pygmy axes that caught a westward sun and heliographed the choppers' progress. Suddenly the end of the line was deserted. Axmen, chainmen, and picket men disappeared—as if swallowed up. Renton swore, fumed, and shouted. Then as suddenly they appeared again and chopped viciously. A tree trembled and fell, and Renton, with eye glued to the telescope, thought he could see fresh cutting ahead of them. He blinked and peered again. The picket man balanced himself and signaled for a point. Renton gave it, struck his backsight into the mold, and, with hands that trembled in spite of himself, steadied its tiny crossarm against the object glass. Then he shouldered the instrument and tramped nervously up the line.

He came up, breathing hard. The choppers waited indifferently, sucking their pipes, an angle being the only place for a smoke. The picket stood vertically beside the new point. From it a blazed line ran east and west, with an array of fresh stakes dwindling into bright yellow points as they entered the mouth of Bottleneck Pass. Renton put down the transit and stared.

"Hell—isn't it?" said the picket man viciously.

Renton nodded—for the moment he could not speak.

"It don't mean shucks to me," went on the other sympathetically, "but isn't that the blamedest luck. Here we've bin bushwhackin' to beat the Dutch, an', by gosh——" His words trailed out inaudibly.

Renton recovered himself with a jerk. "Chain up to the intersection," he said sharply, "and wait till I come back." Then he started for camp and Braithwaite.

An hour afterward he jerked open the door of their tent. Braithwaite was on his back, asleep and breathing stertorously. His face was flushed. Had this not been the woods Renton could have sworn he smelled whisky.

"Braithwaite, I say—Braithwaite—wake up!"

The engineer in charge sat up suddenly, blinking with heavy-lidded eyes. He was furious that he should be found thus asleep—but what was Renton doing here, and now!

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing much," said Renton bitterly. "We've struck the Interoceanic, that's all."

The chief plucked nervously at a ragged beard. "Joking, aren't you?"

"Yes, if that's what you call a joke. The intersection is on the plateau about half a mile from Bottleneck. Their chopping is three days old at least."

The other man looked at him queerly. He was about to speak, then hesitated, with a sudden pallor creeping unhealthily over his brown cheeks. In this silence he studied Renton shrewdly from beneath half-closed lids. At last—slowly—he spoke, jerking his head toward the flap of the tent.

"Nobody out there?"

Renton, puzzled, looked outside. "No—why?"

"Come over here. Now listen carefully. I've been afraid this might happen, and consequently decided what to do in the interests of the road, if it was necessary. Now follow me. You didn't see the Transpacific line at all—none of you did. It wasn't there."

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. What date do you make it?"

"August the eighteenth."

"Wrong again. You're a week ahead. It's the eleventh."

Renton fumbled and pulled out a field book.

"I don't know which of us is crazy. Look at this."

The chief thrust out a shaky hand and rammed the battered notes into his own pocket. "Hold your horses and listen to me. I'm going to teach you something besides running a transit. You know what it means if we don't get right of way through Bottleneck—either a dead end to the western branch or else pay through the nose for running privileges over the Interoceanic."

"I've known that since we started, but that doesn't make this the eleventh of August."

"Then you know too blamed much." Braithwaite leaned forward and peered dominantly into the younger man's face. "Do you propose to euchre the Transpacific for lack of some dates in a transit book?"

Renton's soul recoiled, then steadied. He had a vision of the tremendous development that awaited the day when the Transpacific steel reached salt water. His own future seemed inextricably entwined with that of McDougall's railway. Then came a second vision of another transit man squinting through another instrument at the first stakes driven in Bottleneck Pass. This brought him up short with a sharp sense that all engineers were linked in one honorable bond, and the man who played false was unworthy the name. There was something clean about his job, and he suddenly revolted at the thought of betrayal.

"Count me out," he blurted.

"Do you want to cut your own throat?" said Braithwaite slowly. His eyes were half closed, his lips twitching.

Renton turned on his heel. "If that's what it means, yes. You can do the official lying for the Transpacific."

Braithwaite followed after a moment. "You can get your stuff together. You're going out to-morrow. I'll finish this line myself." Then he added contemptuously: "I'll give you a letter to headquarters, an honorable discharge."

Now of Renton's journey east and his visit to the head office of the Transpacific, it need not be written, nor of his determination to keep his mouth shut as to the manner of his discharge. But it must be recorded that having sent his letter in to the general superintendent, and having kicked his heels in the anteroom for the better part of an hour, he found himself staring at the superintendent's curt instructions to report at once to the engineer in charge of tunnel work on the Transpacific Short Line to the Atlantic seaboard. Of Braithwaite, of the survey of Bottleneck Pass, there was not a word.

So, vastly relieved and just as vastly puzzled, he went round to a large, square, old-fashioned house and inquired whether Miss McDougall might be in.

Fate smiled. In a few moments he was looking into her blue eyes. In the solitude of the woods he had dreamed about these eyes, but now he realized he had not done them justice. Delicious tremors pulsed through him. He hesitated how to begin.

Hester waited demurely. She looked very happy, but supremely self-composed.

Jerkily he told her of his discharge, and of his return to headquarters. Something sealed his lips as to the reason of it.

"But why did Mr. Braithwaite do that? Did you see father?" She was pink with indignation.

"No," he laughed, shaking his head, "somehow it wasn't necessary. Read this."

She looked up, brows wrinkling. "But I don't understand."

"Neither do I. It looks as if some Providence were having an eye on me. Besides, if it were not for this I wouldn't have seen you till October."

"Gracious, and this only Septem ——" She stopped abruptly, the color flooding her cheeks.

"So you see everything has come out rather well," he went on contentedly. And all the while his eyes never left her exquisite face.

"Yes. You'd sooner be in the East, wouldn't you—near your people?" she flashed audaciously.

"That's just it." He leaned forward suddenly and took her hand. "I'd sooner be within reach of my people. Don't you think it's better, too?" he added, stooping close to her.

The blue eyes fell, then slowly their luminous depths were revealed to him. "Perhaps it is," she said unsteadily.

For a moment thus, while the blood pumped riotously through Renton's body—"What about that tunnel?" She laughed. The old Hester had returned again.

For a moment he struggled to understand her; then, because life was very good, and love was very sweet, he decided he could afford to wait a little longer. "It's rather nice work. I like it—good experience, too."

"What a lot you'll know. I'll be quite afraid of you," she added—then, with a gasp: "Oh, Dick—Mr. Renton —I didn't mean that!"

It was too late. His arms were round her. "I love you, love you, love you!" he said. He felt like a king, and his eyes were very bright.

She stayed for a moment motionless, while fire ran through him. Presently she lifted a small and very flushed face. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she stammered, without moving.

He laughed triumphantly. "I am—can't you see I am?"

An hour later he descended the wide stone steps. His feet might have been on earth, but he didn't know it. His brain was reeling with visions of railway superintendents, Bottleneck Passes, honorable discharges, tunnels, and a small rosy face encircled with an aura of light-brown hair that looked like gold in the sunlight. Then because he was a keen, active, ambitious, progressive young man, he promptly determined to concentrate on the work in hand, and just as promptly decided that that was almost more than any man could be expected to do.

In a week he had settled down in charge of a long tunnel on the Short Line. Bottleneck Pass slid into the background of things best forgotten, and Hester's face peered at him out of the booming darkness every time he sighted up to the heading. A month of this. Then came rumors of trouble betwen two great transcontinental railways. Renton pondered, said nothing,

and sought comfort in reading between the lines of Hester's letters. He balked at the thought that it was possible that Hester's father might expect him to back up Braithwaite's perjury.

Came a long missive. One paragraph caught and held him:

I have seen very little of father lately. I had intended to tell him about ourselves before this, but he has been so worried and unlike himself that it did not seem wise just yet. I know there's a dispute with the Interoceanic, and believe it's about that very survey you were on, because Mr. Braithwaite was here last night. Just as he was going, I thought I heard your name, and then father said: "Very well, I'll send for him." I haven't seen father at all to-day, and do hope, dearest, that nothing is going to happen to make you anxious or uncomfortable. Dick, darling, are you sure you love me, just as you said in your last letter? I can hardly believe we are as happy as we know we are. Isn't that silly?

He read it slowly and carefully, then read it again, dwelling on the last sentences. He was sure at least of two things: Right would always be right, and Hester would always be Hester.

That night he walked through the completed portion of the tunnel. Blackness closed in around the red circle of his lantern. Far ahead, at the breast of the drift, he heard the clatter of rock drills. Steel cars, loaded for the dump, roared past him toward the faint spot of light at the tunnel mouth. The jagged roof was wet and slimy, the air damp like that of a vault. Sometimes the drills ceased their clangor, and silence enveloped him like a cloak, dark and impalpable, full of suggestions that plucked at a mind that already began to yield to doubt and reiterant questionings.

Fate spoke the very next day, spoke in the words of a letter from Peterson, chief counsel of the Transpacific. Renton swallowed a lump in his throat, pulled off his long boots, and started for the city. On the way to Peterson's office he passed a large square, old-fashioned house, but this time he did not stop. Arriving at Peterson's, he sent in his name, and was asked to wait —Mr. Peterson was engaged at the moment. Again he kicked his heels, wondering what destiny should thus call young engineers from their appointed work and harass their souls with trickery and fraud.

Presently a door opened, an office boy beckoned, and Renton found himself sitting opposite a tall, lean man, with smooth, clean-shaven cheeks, cold gray-green eyes, and thin, compressed lips. Behind him, a door leading to an inner office was partly open. Between them was an enormous flat-topped desk covered with blue prints and field books.

Peterson looked across the desk. He did not speak, but his gray eyes traveled slowly over the engineer's face. Never had Renton experienced such a scrutiny as this. It made him at first restless, then uncomfortable, then grimly defiant.

"Mr. Renton," said the lawyer slowly, "I have asked you to come here to discuss with you a very important matter—one, I may say, in which I believe you can be of material assistance to your employers. It is but seldom in my experience that very young men, such as yourself, have the opportunity to be of such assistance. I say this that you may not underestimate the importance of the matter to yourself, because it is of very great importance to the company. It is by using rare occasions that men profit most. There is another thing I would like to point out. All great works, such as railways, involve sacrifices—one might say they are built up on sacrifices. There seems to be an economic sequence about this. I put these points to you first because they have a distinct bearing on what follows."

Renton nodded. He felt slowly

chilled, and did not want to speak till he must.

"There is at present," went on the lawyer, pressing the tips of his long fingers together, "a serious point at issue between this company and the Interoceanic. As you know, both roads seek an outlet to the Pacific. So far we have worked in harmony, but just at present there is a dispute as to priority of location in Bottleneck Pass. This pass of course practically controls access to the most desirable harbor on the Western coast. Mr. Braithwaite's party made that location, and I understand you ran the actual line under his direction."

"Yes, I did." The engineer's voice was husky, and shook in spite of him.

"And your work covered the location to the pass?"

"It did."

"And you were transferred to headquarters by Mr. Braithwaite on August the twelfth."

The time had come. The blood rose to Renton's temples, and he shook his head. "No, on the nineteenth."

Peterson looked at him over his glasses. He seemed surprised. "Surely not. Braithwaite's notes give it as the twelfth."

The engineer exploded. "Braithwaite is a liar."

The lawyer smiled. It was cold and wintry. Then he took up another book. Renton recognized it immediately as his own field notes. "That can hardly be so. Here are your own figures. The last entry is on the eleventh—the day you stopped work."

Renton's hand went out. "May I see that?" He felt rather sick. Peterson glanced at him, then handed the book across the desk. "Certainly."

"These are not my figures—mine are rubbed out."

Again that wintry smile. "They correspond with the other notes turned in by that party."

Suddenly Renton saw red. "Do you want the truth?" he snapped.

The lawyer leaned back in his chair. "I shall be very glad to hear anything you have to say. But don't forget what I explained at the beginning of our talk," he added meaningly.

"Well, the truth is this: I did locate that line, and ran into the Interoceanic survey half a mile east of the pass. That was on the eighteenth, whatever Braithwaite says. I left the transit at the intersection and went back to camp and told Braithwaite. He was worried about it, then told me he had been preparing for such an occurrence. Then he tried to persuade me that it was the eleventh, and I said he could do his own lying. Then he sacked me, and I started for headquarters with a letter. How I got my next job, I don't know."

"Is there anything to prove this?"

"Yes, there is."

"What—may I ask?"

"The Interoceanic survey party," flashed Renton. He was hot under the collar, and wondered how much Peterson got a year for doing such dirty work.

The chief counsel's thin lips twitched. "I'm afraid their evidence is hardly available for the purpose. The engineers of that party are all now in the employ of the Transpacific."

"What!"

"They were their men—now they are ours. You don't expect them to go into the box against us, do you?"

Renton's jaw dropped. He seemed to be fighting the air. Then something surged through his brain. He got very red. "There is something else to prove it."

"Yes—again may I ask what?"

"A letter," stammered the engineer. "A letter—I—I—wrote to Miss McDougall. It went out with a packet on the fifteenth. We were then six miles from the pass."

"And do you think for an instant

that Miss McDougall would produce a private letter from you—an engineer in her father's employ—to be used to defeat her father's plans? My dear sir, you can't imagine that."

Renton's breath came fast. Put in this light it was inconceivable. He was ready to sacrifice his position and his future with the Transpacific, but this would also mean sacrificing his heart's desire. Thrust thus into a corner he hesitated, feeling Peterson's cold eyes on him, weighing, analyzing every process of his anxious brain. He floundered about in this abyss, and then faintly, but quite distinctly, he heard a voice. It came clearly across his mental quagmire, and he recognized it at once. It was the voice which had held together good men and true ever since the world began. It had strengthened and encouraged them when skies were blackest, and defeat grinned viciously at every step. It was deeper than love, stronger than passion, higher than fear, nobler than self-interest. It was the voice of honor. Instantly Renton made his choice. He would see this thing through, whatever the cost.

"You can buy Braithwaite," he said steadily, "but you can't buy me. You can hire the Interoceanic survey party, but you can't hire me. As to Bottleneck Pass, if you win I'll be with the loser. Good morning."

He got up and started for the passage. Peterson, too, got up hastily. His mouth was twitching, and there was a queer light in his gray eyes. "One moment, Mr. Renton! Don't be hasty. There's too much at stake. Think this thing over and come and see me at this time to-morrow. And now you'd better use my private exit. Through here, please." He pointed to the other office.

Renton pushed aside the door and stalked through. Then he stopped abruptly. McDougall was standing in the middle of the floor, facing him. His face was red, his eyes bright. Renton nodded, and was about to pass on, when a thick arm was thrust into his own, and the two walked out together in speechless union. At the door was McDougall's car. They got in and rolled smoothly uptown.

"Mr. McDougall," stammered the engineer, "I——"

"Don't talk," snapped the railway man, "I'm thinking."

Renton stared, said nothing, and battered his brain in vain. The car stopped, they got out and went up broad stone steps into a large, square, old-fashioned house.

"Lunch in ten minutes," said McDougall, and disappeared.

Came a sound of small, light feet, and Hester's head was on Renton's shoulder. "Oh, Dick, darling, I'm so happy, but dad made me promise to say nothing. Have you had a bad morning?"

Followed an intermission which concerned them only. "It was pretty thick," he said gently, "and I'm in the woods yet as to what it means."

She put a finger on his lips. "Wait a bit—here's father."

Of that lunch Renton remembers but little, save that every now and then floor, table, and chairs seemed to slide away and leave him eating ambrosial food on the edge of a cloud, while Hester and her father floated irregularly about on other adjacent clouds. He answered automatically when spoken to, and relapsed forthwith into wonderment. His recollection was that they talked about books, pictures, the suffrage question, and raising chickens. Then, at the end of it, McDougall jerked his head toward the library, and Renton followed him upstairs.

The railway man closed the door, gave Renton a cigar, lit one himself, and, peering thoughtfully through a gray cloud, began to speak.

"Renton, I've been looking for certain things all my life. I needed them

in my business. I've had a job finding 'em. I've got some, and I need more. When I get 'em I keep 'em. I'm talking about a certain kind of man. I guess you know what kind. Now this morning you were on the grill, and the grill was hot. I arranged that, and heard every word you said."

Renton stiffened in his chair, but McDougal went dominantly on:

"The difference between you and Braithwaite is that he lied when I didn't want him to—and you wouldn't lie when you thought that was what I wanted. How long have you been with the Transpacific?"

"Three years, sir."

"What work have you done?"

"Location, construction, bridge work, and a little tunnel work."

"I suppose you think you're working for me."

Renton nodded. "Who else?"

McDougall flicked the end off his cigar. "You're not. Your boss is downstairs. We're both working for her. She's made my life a burden about you—confound you!"

"Do you mean——"

"Go down and get your orders for the next month—if you can fix it up with her. And, I say, report at my office in thirty days. There's room for you there. Don't ask me questions. I'm not used to it."

Renton felt dizzy, but reached for the door handle. On the threshold he paused. "Just one question, sir, no more!"

"What is it?"

"Why did you hire the Interoceanic survey party?"

"I didn't hire 'em. I bought the whole blame system last week."

Then Renton blinked and went downstairs.

THE BELLE OF THE BALL

WHEN Henry L. Mencken and Frederic J. Haskin were running around in Missouri and Illinois in pursuit of the wonderful delights that can be obtained from dancing all night after a country picnic, nobody realized that both of the young men were destined to take their places among the leading literary lights of the United States—Mencken as a critic, novelist, and humorist; Haskin as a journalist and author.

What everybody did realize, however, was that Mencken was a handsome, well-built young man—something which nobody ever really emphasized in discussing Haskin. In proof of this, Haskin tells this sory about a wonderful ball that he and Mencken attended one night in the Missouri woods. The dancing had been fast and furious. The violin and the banjo had hung garlands of music on the air. And Mencken had been particularly attentive to a lovely young woman, whose father sat over in one corner running his fingers through his alfalfa whiskers and taking great pride in his daughter's popularity.

When it was getting along toward three o'clock in the morning, Mencken, who was guiding the young woman through a waltz, paused in the middle of the floor and executed a particularly effective pirouette. He did it gracefully. He did it rapidly. It made an impression on the entire assemblage.

Just as it concluded, and the young couple swung again into the measured rhythm of the dance, the girl's father hurriedly untangled his fingers from the alfalfa whiskers, sprang to his feet, emitted a shout of elation, and cried in a high, shrill voice:

"Minnie, you're the belle of the ball! I'll be switched if you ain't!"

The Conflict

A TALE OF THE WAR OF THE NATIONS

By Colonel Max Desprez

* * * Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging through the thunderstorm.

Now that the brazen throat of war is filling the world with its din, that the gigantic tragedy is unfolding upon the crowded stage of Europe day by day to our numbed and horrified senses, this novel comes to us with all the detailed color and freshness of a canvas of Meissonier. Also, there is something prophetic and inevitable about the story that goes beyond war and its blight. Even in this first installment you sense that "philosophy of history" of which Hegel was the chief expounder. But this deeper current of thought is skillfully hidden in the romance itself. The author is first of all a teller of tales, a philosopher afterward. In Luxembourg the beautiful, the drama opens, with a brilliant German army officer as Chorus. Listening to him are three Americans—one an old diplomat, the other two lovers. Hardly has the liege of the Kaiser finished speaking when guns are heard, uhlans prance into the peaceful streets of Luxembourg, and into the the air spring the wasps-of-war. With a blare of trumpets the curtain rises. and you who read this tale will be spellbound by what we hold to be the finest work of fiction that this war of the nations has so far inspired.

(A Novel in Four Parts—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG MR. MORGAN DRINKS THE GERMAN WINE IN LUXEMBOURG.

ROBERT CAMERON, United States diplomatic representative in the sovereign state and ancient Duchy of Luxembourg, was having, what was unusual for him, an unpleasant dream. He was stretched out in his teakwood chair on the lawn between his gates and the solid old house which was a Schlosshause in the days when there were robber barons and Luxembourg was part of the Bishopric of Treves. Now the house, at an absurdly reasonable rent, made a most comfortable dwelling for his sedate and modest household ménage.

Perhaps it was a bee from the neighboring geometrical beds of heliotrope and verbena which had come to inspect his gray hair and white mustache, and buzzed like a tiny airship past his ear. Perhaps it was something he read in the paper which, fallen from his knee, now lay neglected on the grass beside him. It was a copy of the London *Times*, and Mr. Cameron, a conscientious, if obscure, diplomat, had been trying hard to work his way through a heavy leader on the warlike situation in

the "near East" and the Balkans when sleep had overtaken him.

The leader writer of "the Thunderer" had hinted vaguely and guardedly at serious dangers to the peace of Europe through the present situation, but it was hard to follow and hard to understand what the writer was driving at. During the twenty-five years he had spent in the diplomatic service in Europe, Mr. Cameron had been accustomed to read such editorials almost daily, and at just this drowsy hour after luncheon. Hitherto the effect had always been the same: balmy, soothing sleep; but on this golden August afternoon the sleep was not soothing, and was accompanied by dreams.

Such dreams! Burning houses collapsing in red chaos, and women and children screaming and flying and overcome. Swarms of helmeted men with streaming standards borne before them sweeping up vast hillsides and borne back again. The air darkened with clouds of smoke with the dim shadows of gigantic dirigibles and dragonfly monoplanes athwart the sky, mountains and hillsides spouting fire. All the military glitter and equipment that he had seen in a dozen capitals—at Potsdam, at Petersburg, at Vienna, in Paris; Cossacks with their wild horses, German uhlans and Hussars of Death in their black dolmans, gray-overcoated Russian infantry and French chasseurs à cheval with horsehair plumes in their shining helmets whirled before him in a vast and terrible welter! A hundred battle flags and heraldic ensigns! Cæsar's eagles, and Prussia's double eagle, the British lion, the flaming tricolor, lances and pennons, men and horses, bayonets and swarming field guns overturned in heaps! It was Armageddon. The nations of the earth were locked together in a terrific death grapple!

And then—the bee sent its minatory challenge a little too close to his ear, one sheet of the *Times* which still hung on his knee slid to the grass with a tiny crackle, the dream collapsed, and Mr. Cameron rose to his feet and blinked in the sunlight. Perhaps thirty seconds of earthly time would encompass the duration of the dream, but to Mr. Cameron then it seemed that he had lived for ages in that horrible nightmare land into which many a diplomat has strayed unwillingly in his sleeping hours.

It was reassuring to see the tranquillity and calm of the afternoon. Behind him across the lawn was the dignified yellow-stone Château des Herthereux, so cheap to rent, so comfortable—and, as his niece Charlotte had often pointed out, so inconvenient. Before him were the ornamental French iron gates of his domain, and beyond that the still stretch of the Boulevard Adalbert which, in a white line, fringed with the dark green of linden trees, stretched all the way from the edge of the rocky height, past the park and into the very heart of the beautiful, sleepy, orderly little city of Luxembourg.

Mr. Cameron stepped through the gates and beyond, reflecting that a man might fire a cannon down this thoroughfare without hitting any one, when a black motor car came into view beneath the lindens, slowed suddenly as it passed him, and, sounding a warning Klaxon, swung in through the gates. The rear seat was filled with various baggages, including a bag of golf clubs and a leather case for tennis rackets with just enough room for a very tall, broad, clear-skinned young man, who leaped out as the car stopped and came toward him with outstretched hand.

"Fairfax Morgan!" said Mr. Cameron. "I'm glad to see you. I didn't expect you so soon. Tell your man to put the car up in the garage, straight past the house about two hundred feet—he can't miss it. There's a room ready for you."

Morgan was not only tall, but good looking. A fine type of American, quietly good-humored, not at all assertive in bearing.

"Cornelius," he said to his man, "put her up and get the stuff out."

Cornelius was short, well made, brown-haired, with a mouth that gave the impression of one used to deal in few, brief words.

"Sure, doc," he said, "I'll put her up. What did you think I was going to do with her?" He made the engine buzz louder preparatory to throwing in the clutch.

"And say—Cornelius!" Morgan raised his voice.

Cornelius moderated the buzz and opened his mouth a little at one side. "Yee-ah!" he said.

"You'd better take out those spark plugs and look at them. She was missing back there at Spa."

Cornelius half turned round in his seat with an expression indicating that speech made him weary.

"On the dead level, doc," he said, "them plugs is all right. You amachoor drivers——"

"If you won't do it I will," said Morgan.

"Oh, I'll *do* it," said Cornelius.

Morgan took a step toward him.

"On the dead level, I'll look at them, doc," said Cornelius again. "I'll do it. On the dead!"

As he vanished Morgan turned back to Mr. Cameron.

"Fairfax," said Cameron, "I wouldn't have that man a day. He's the most impudent——"

Morgan's face expanded. "He's all right. It's only his way. He's an East Side boy, and he hasn't much polish. But say—Mr. Cameron, this is a fine place you've got here. I'm glad I came."

"I can live here," said Cameron, "more comfortably on four thousand a year than I could on twenty thousand in New York. The rent of this is three hundred dollars a year. And it's a good climate—and there's peace and tranquillity here. It's a rest after New York or Washington."

"How are you?" said Morgan. "And how's Charlotte?"

"She's all right. She doesn't like it here much. How's the golf and how's the tennis?"

"Golf, rotten. Tennis, fair. I got a couple of mugs in England. I'm going to try it out at Cannes and Nice. Where's Charlotte now?"

"Out behind the house. Run along and see her."

They shook hands again, and Mr. Cameron watched Morgan as he went off. He felt satisfied that Fairfax was the right man for Charlotte. Charlotte had some high German connections on her mother's side, but Mr. Cameron felt that he would rather see her married to an American.

Morgan had money enough and not too much—he had always been a hard worker—not brilliant perhaps, but sound and sure to win a position for himself as a surgeon. He worked hard and played hard, and was kindly and capable—altogether Mr. Cameron's idea of an American gentleman.

His only weak point was that he seemed a little afraid of Charlotte, and that he stood a lot of infernal impudence from that intolerable chauffeur whom he had rescued from a life alternating between the box of a taxicab and the prize ring—Cornelius Healy.

Healy firmly believed that Morgan was the most generous man and greatest doctor in the world and that he had saved his life when he had patched up two broken ribs for him. He paid his debt of gratitude by treating Morgan as an equal, not a superior, and by a stanch and unspoken loyalty.

Morgan was thinking of neither Healy nor Mr. Cameron, but of Charlotte. He found her beside a tea table,

under the trees. She was rather tall, slim, and it was easy, as Morgan had often found it, to trace the two racial strains in her. There was something still and dreamy and romantic in her. Morgan was always afraid that she might fall helplessly in love with some dark, magnetic, but unpleasant stranger. And also there was something brisk and practical and nervous. Her gestures were too sudden and flashing in their grace for the pure-blooded Teuton, her face too light and vivacious and too irregular for an unmixed strain of German blood.

She wasn't ruddy enough for a German nor pale enough for an American. Her transparent blue eyes were set wide apart. There was just a touch of prominence to the cheek bones and the faintest suggestion of delicate angularity in the whole face. Her wavy dead brown hair covered what Morgan thought the noblest part of a wide and capable forehead, for he remembered her when she was quite a little girl and wore the hair pushed back with a round comb.

If those scientists who years ago classified temperaments had recognized such a thing as the lymphatic-nervous constitution Charlotte would have typified it. In dress she had always possessed a genius for a "chic" and grace that avoided the strikingly smart and fashionable. She had a decided trend toward thrift and economy, a lot of sound generosity and unselfishness, and at fifteen or so had been very religious —but this had dropped away from her as she grew older. And over and above all this, she had a strong sense of humor.

"Fairfax," she said, "it's good to see you."

Morgan had held both her hands a second before he realized that there was a gentleman standing near by. She remembered her other guest at the same moment.

"Count von Hollman—Doctor Morgan," she said.

Von Hollman straightened, his heels clicked, he bowed stiffly from the waist.

"I have hear-rd of Doctor Morgan," he said. "I am pleased to know him." There was just enough roll to the "r," just enough throaty fullness to the tone to show that his vocal organs had been used to German speech before they had been trained to French or English. He did not offer his hand; and Morgan, a little confused, gave a slouchy imitation of the military bow, and stared curiously.

Count Otto von Hollman was worth more than a hasty glance anywhere. In the first place he was evidently and palpably what Morgan described as "a great swell." It was nothing that Hollman "put on" or was aware of at all. It was an utterly unconscious, and, because of that, really an arresting and commanding atmosphere of superiority and authority—hard to define, but easy to apprehend when one meets it. There was something about him that made him a man hard to disregard or ignore and impossible to ridicule. In the second place he was sufficiently distinguished as a physical type to arrest attention anywhere. Morgan immediately recognized him as the dark, magnetic individual whose influence on Charlotte he long had dreaded. Only Hollman was not at all unpleasant—decidedly otherwise, to a man as well as a woman.

Morgan towered above him by at least four inches; but in spite of that Hollman's high, square shoulders, his narrow, well-poised head, his high forehead, and his general look of lean, long efficiency made him look much taller than he was. Descended though he was from the highest and purest Prussian blood, his pallor, his obliquely set dark eyes, his smooth dark hair gave something Slavic, almost Asiatic, to his appearance. He was clothed in the

correct flannels of an Englishman, but no one would ever have taken him for an Englishman anywhere. Morgan had just time to note his slim white hands with their long, tapering fingers when the count waved one of these hands to a table behind him on which was set a large silver bowl, a platter of cracked ice, and sundry bottles.

"You have come at the right time, Mr. Morgan," he said. "I am making a May bowl. The prinzessin—Miss Charlotte says that it can only be made in the spring—but I have some of the Waldmeister here in this little package—and we shall all taste it."

"Yes, we'll all taste it." This came from Mr. Cameron, who had joined them and who was helping to divest Morgan of the long duster he wore and to relieve him of his motoring gauntlets.

Morgan sank into the chair hospitably pushed beneath him, and when he wasn't looking at Charlotte watched the evolutions of the count and his bowl of May wine. Helping him in his task was the Cameron butler—also North German, but of a decidedly different type from the count.

Schwarz, the butler, was a fine, upstanding figure of a man who might have weighed two hundred pounds, heavy-handed, rosy-cheeked, and, in spite of his name, blue-eyed and decidedly blond. When gazing on the world at large his eyes were good-humored and kindly, but at the present moment they were fixed on Von Hollman, and were those of a faithful hound.

Had Morgan watched the brewing of the bowl more and the two who brewed it less, his behavior on this particular afternoon might have been different. But his eyes were, in spite of himself, hungry for the sight of Charlotte's, and as Charlotte's often left his to watch the count, Morgan saw little but the two.

Into the bowl went herbs and ice and sliced cucumber and brandy and champagne. Finally it was completed, and Schwarz passed around goblets that held much more than they appeared to hold.

Mr. Cameron drained his, and handed it back with a loud smack. Charlotte barely touched hers to her lips, gazing at Hollman the while. And Hollman, looking into those blue cornflower eyes and reading in them no one knows what, drained his to the dregs, and handed it to Schwarz, who promptly refilled it.

Fairfax Morgan, both by habit and inclination, was temperate—not to say abstemious. His training as a physician, his experience as a man, his physical fineness and condition as an athlete made even an occasional indulgence in alcohol distasteful to him. But something in the golden sunshine that flickered beneath the lime trees and glanced through the amber of the wine, something in the presence of Charlotte whom he had not seen for months, and some uneasy, unworthy jealousy stirred in him by her evident respect for Von Hollman made him drain the glass three times before he finally waved the butler away from him.

He could feel the stir in his blood, the excitement—and if his eyes or the wine did not deceive him—the count, who had drank as deeply and did not look like a drinking man, was similarly affected. His dark, oblique eyes had taken on a darker gleam, and Morgan noticed that one thing that marked them as peculiar was that the pupils were much larger than in the normal man. Something masterful, commanding, almost cruel, began to show under the suavity of his countenance—and to show a little also in his speech.

The conversation engineered at first by Mr. Cameron had gone from climate and weather to athletics and more specifically to golf and tennis, and Char-

lotte had announced that she fully expected Morgan to win the tournament at Nice. Wilding and Brookes might enter, as Mr. Cameron had suggested, but Fairfax would win the tournament, according to Charlotte.

"So!" said Von Hollman, holding out the glass for the butler's ladle to refill. "I would be willing to bet you a hundred guineas—five hundred dollars—in spite of the Prinzessin Charlotte—that you will not win the tournament at Nice."

"I don't bet on myself," said Morgan shortly.

He was in serious doubt whether it was he or the count who had tarried too long with the May wine, but he knew that something was wrong. He found it impossible to take his eyes from the count's, and he seemed to see in those inky pools—or was it the horrible, alcoholic, unhygienic concoction he had swallowed?—something confident, menacing, and deadly.

"Pardon," said the count, toying with his glass. "I am ignorant perhaps of the etiquette of the sport—but suppose I were to say that I would bet you five hundred dollars that there would be no tennis tournament at all at Nice."

"It's scheduled!" said Morgan mildly. "I have the date somewhere."

"Scheduled!" The count snapped his tapering fingers. "Pouf! You English! You Americans! You are children. What does your poet say? 'Young barbarians—all at play.'"

The evident and growing arrogance in Von Hollman's manner would have been offensive in one less finely strung. There was something keen and flashing about it—nothing coarsely brutal. Mr. Cameron, sitting very straight in his chair, muttered something about "other barbarians" behind his white mustache, but Morgan preserved his good-natured calm. He saw that it was not only the wine, but something intoxicating in the admiring eyes of Charlotte, that had gone to the count's head, and his momentary feeling of jealousy was driven out by a sort of wonderment and admiration at the sight of such a lordly buck trumpeting and displaying his points for the benefit of the doe.

"I take it," he said, "that you don't think much of athletics."

"Your athletics"—the count curled up his little dark mustache, "golf, tennis, cricket. The games of children! What use are they?"

"They keep a man fit."

"Fit for what? To eat—and drink and sleep."

"What *are* athletics for, anyway?" It was Charlotte who spoke.

The count turned to her. "To make a man master of his body as of his mind. To teach him to fire a gun, to ride a horse, to swim a stream, to grapple with an enemy hand to hand. To make him fit to fight for himself, his wife, and his country. Come, Monsieur Tennis Player. I will show you something." He addressed Morgan as he rose.

Surely, thought Morgan afterward, there was something peculiarly intoxicating in that May bowl—and something maddening, too, in the soft blue eyes of the beautiful Charlotte who sat between them. Afterward Morgan congratulated himself that he had not been the aggressor and had been a little the saner of the two—but, watching the tense, supple figure of the count, he felt his anger slowly rising and his hair strangely stirring and bristling on the back of his neck. There was something in the quiet garden that seemed to breathe of ancient racial animosities, of feuds centuries old.

"Catch my right hand," said Von Hollman. "Set your left foot against my left foot. Brace yourself. Try to make me move from my stand—I shall try to do the same by you. You are the larger man—a professed ath-

lete—after the English fashion. Let us see."

The sport that Hollman thus invited him to was one that Morgan had seen practiced from childhood under the totally erroneous name of "Japanese wrestling." Its possibilities as a game are decidedly limited, and it has the sole merit of being the one athletic sport of a strenuous nature that may be practiced in a hall bedroom. It gives an enormous advantage to weight and big bones, and accordingly Morgan faced his smaller antagonist with no feeling other than a mild wonder and curiosity.

Once he grasped the hand of Von Hollman, however, a change came over the spirit of his dreams. The fingers that looked so white and tapering seemed to be made of tempered steel, and they clasped Morgan's like a vise. Von Hollman's body seemed to be made of steel springs.

For a moment they swayed, first to right, then to left. Then Von Hollman's lithe body turned. Without shifting his feet his whole torso swung about, so that he was facing rearward and that Morgan's hand clasped in his was over his right shoulder. Suddenly he bent forward and pulled hard on Morgan's hand, and as suddenly Morgan was lifted clear from the earth and tumbled over on the turf.

The German butler helped him to arise, and Hollman had turned and was bending toward Charlotte when Mr. Cameron asserted himself.

"This is the most ridiculous performance I have ever seen among grown men," he said. "Fairfax, you ought to be old enough to know better!"

Fairfax Morgan, tumbled and dishevelled, felt there was something of injustice in his reproof as addressed to him, but said nothing. Hollman turned on the old gentleman, and laid his hands on his shoulders.

"My dear friend," he said, "we are not all as wise as you. Forgive us. Let us drink another glass."

He pressed a goblet of the wine into Cameron's hand; and the latter, after a moment's hesitation, drained it. He himself, taking another glass from the hand of the butler, raised it to his lips.

"To the day!" he said in German. As he spoke, a slow rumble in the air, a quivering of the ground beneath their feet, a brief, breathless pause, and then another slow, menacing rumble seemed to emphasize his toast. The butler was standing straight and still like a soldier, his eyes fixed on the count.

"That's a dynamite explosion," said Morgan, "or else it's cannon."

"My friend, I think it is cannon," said the count. And as he spoke another slow, sullen rumble filled the air.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAY BOWL PROVES ITSELF A POTENT BEVERAGE.

A little later Morgan and Charlotte stood together on the stairs within the old yellow-stone château.

"Isn't he nice?" said Charlotte. Her eyes were fixed on Morgan, and she seemed dying to have him agree with her.

"Yes," said Morgan grudgingly.

"And isn't he *strong?*"

"I suppose so. But that was a trick. I dare say I'm stronger than he is."

"Oh, I don't know!" Charlotte shook her head. A beam of sunlight fell across her, and there was something ethereally blond and innocent about the back-drawn hair, the blue eyes, and the fair, straight-featured face.

"I wish I were as strong as he is," she said.

"I'm glad you're not."

"Do you think I'm anything like him?"

"Not a bit."

"We're both German—you know—at

least I am on one side—and he's a prince—and I'm a princess if I want to be."

Morgan stepped back from her. "All right, princess," he said. "Go to your prince. You don't need an ordinary American like me."

"Oh, yes, I do, Fairfax," said Charlotte. "Only I've heard the greatest lot about my mother's connections here—and I really *am* a princess. But what do you think of Count von Hollman?"

"He's all right," said Morgan rather unenthusiastically.

"He's strong, anyway," insisted Charlotte. "I wish I could throw you about like that. I'm fairly strong though—for a woman. Just see!"

She bent forward and flexed the biceps muscle. Morgan reached forward and grasped it. It was strong, but it was the strength of a woman, a round, firm arm. Touching it thrilled him. Her face was near to his, and her blue eyes were like blue lakes in which a man might drown—happily. Morgan afterward insisted it was an accident—the wine may have had something to do with it. Charlotte herself admitted that it was utterly unlike Fairfax, that she had never been in her life so much surprised and disappointed in a man. But at any rate, instead of thinking of her strength, he thought only of her freshness and sweetness, and felt himself tumbling off a precipice to plunge into the clear blue depths of her eyes. He kissed her on the lips, and for a moment it seemed that she kissed him, too.

"Fairfax Morgan!" She had drawn away from him indignantly.

"It was an accident," said Morgan.

"Accident! How dare——" She fell silent, and her face changed from outraged dignity to a formal smile.

"Count Otto," she said, "we are still talking of sport and athletics."

Von Hollman had entered the hall behind them.

"Sport!" he said. "Children playing on the edge of a precipice."

As he spoke the château seemed rocked to its base, the windows rattled in a low, sullen reverberation of sound.

"Thunder!" said Charlotte.

"Yes," said Von Hollman, "I think there's a thunderstorm brewing, although the sky seems clear enough."

"You evidently don't think much of modern sport," said Morgan, who had not recovered his composure quite as readily as had Charlotte.

"No, I don't." Hollman's voice was suave and ingratiating, his face had lost the savage arrogance that had shone through it a little earlier in the afternoon. There might have been something tolerantly patronizing in his smile—and then again it might have been Morgan's fancy. There was something about the man Morgan could not help liking and admiring—something solid and masculine and magnetic.

"You don't believe that Waterloo was won on the cricket fields of England," said Morgan.

"I don't believe that it was won in England or on the cricket field or by the English. I believe that it was won by Blücher and the Prussians on the field of Waterloo. As for sport, cricket, football, tennis—they are charming, if you will, but impractical. There's something feminine, almost effeminate, about athletics."

"Feminine!" said Charlotte. "You surprise me! I thought that athletics of all sorts were the very top pitch of masculine virility."

Von Hollman lit a cigarette. "Look at the Greeks and the Romans," he said. "Every nation represents a principle, every nation is either masculine or feminine in its genius. The Greeks were feminine, they were the greatest race of amateur athletes the world has ever seen. Did the Romans practice

athletics? No, they had slaves to contest before them, but reserved their own strength for the real business of life, for warfare. They conquered and dominated Greece as the masculine must always conquer and dominate the feminine. The French to-day are feminine. The greatest boxer in the world to-day is a Frenchman, but what of the French army? The athletes of the air, the aviators who perform the most astonishing and useless tricks are Frenchmen, but where are the French Zeppelins? And what is the present state of the French navy?"

"And America, Count Otto," said Charlotte, "is it masculine or feminine?"

"Oh, feminine," said the count, "and altogether charming." His manner as he said it, the delicate inclination of his head, his eyes as they rested on Charlotte's made the general statement seem like a personal compliment. Morgan saw the flush rising in Charlotte's cheeks, and her eyes brighten.

"What do you call the English?" he suggested. "They go in for athletics. Are they feminine as a race?"

"The English," said the count slowly, "are neither masculine or feminine. As a race they have no sex at all. Their lack of positive qualities has deceived the rest of the world and given it a false impression of English force and English efficiency. Their British empire will dissipate one day like a mist before the sun, and historians will one day write down the English as the most overrated people in the whole history of mankind."

As he spoke a small boy with a blue uniform covered with many rows of brass buttons appeared on a large bicycle coming up the path to the house. The German butler met him at the door and received from him a pink telegram which he handed to Count Hollman on a silver tray.

With a word of apology to Charlotte, Hollman opened the dispatch and pored over its contents for a moment.

His eyes seemed to grow brighter and steadier, his whole face more commanding and intent. He drew in his breath with a slow, hissing sound, then suddenly his figure became tense and upright, his heels clicked together.

He half turned and held the telegram to the butler. Morgan could see enough of it to realize that it was written in code, but its effect on the butler was so astonishing as to draw his attention from the message itself.

"Carl!" said Hollman in a low tone. *"Sehen Sie!"* Carl's china-blue eyes, at first dull and fishy, actually flashed, and for a moment seemed to take on the expression of the count's. His figure became upright and rigid, his heels clicked together, his hand came up, palm forward, stiff and rigid in the Prussian military salute.

Von Hollman wheeled from him suddenly, and turned to the other two. "My regrets, prinzessin! The business is urgent that calls me, I must go at once. I hope that we may meet again —we shall surely."

"Oh, surely!" said Charlotte softly. *"Auf wiedersehen."*

Ten minutes later, Hollman, in his own car, with his own chauffeur, took his departure. Charlotte watched the dust of the vanishing machine with some regret. Von Hollman had interested her, his sudden departure puzzled and annoyed her. She hated to have her plans upset, hated sudden changes, and this evening, which was to become a memorable one with every one in the Château des Herthereux, brought her one more annoyance.

Carl, the butler, had disappeared. The discovery was made an hour later. No one had seen him go, but he was not to be found, and a great many of his belongings had gone with him, while his trunk was locked and corded in a corner of his neat little room. All the

horrible lithographs which Carl loved, even to the picture of the kaiser, were gone from the walls and had vanished.

The deserted little room which Carl had occupied for so many months sent an unpleasant chill through Charlotte, and as she went slowly down the winding stairs to join the others in the dining room, she was conscious of a feeling of impending disaster, a sensation that the whole world was waiting breathless for some impending calamity —a feeling that she could not analyze or explain, but could not shake off.

There was a sort of gloom and silence brooding over the little dinner table, and once or twice the desultory conversation was broken by a low reverberation—something like distant thunder, but more unpleasant and minatory in sound than any thunder they had ever heard before.

CHAPTER III.

A FRENCH AVIATOR ARRIVES AT THE CHATEAU DES HERTHEREUX.

The Château des Herthereux stands in the outskirts of Luxembourg City, on the Boulevard Adalbert, which stretches west till it hits the main road north and south. The château has or had at that time considerable grounds of its own. It is on a level with the boulevard in the front, but in the rear it terminates in an abrupt, rocky declivity from which one may overlook the low town of Luxembourg with its narrow streets and crowded, picturesque houses. From the boulevard to the edge of the cliff is a distance of almost a thousand feet, part of which is taken up by the house and its stable, but the rearward end of which is a fine, grassy slope, tilted downward slightly toward the edge of the cliff.

Morgan's bedroom was in a turret with a winding stair beneath. It afforded him a private entrance of his own to the lawn. He felt restless and uneasy. Mr. Cameron was busy playing his favorite game of solitaire and was not to be disturbed. Charlotte had vanished somewhere; and Morgan, thrown on his own resources, finally filled a pipe and went outside. He wanted some sort of companionship, and he thought he might run into Healy, who, in spite of Cameron's opinion of him, was a man worth talking to.

There was no moon so far that night, and the air was heavy with the scent of the late-blooming roses for which Luxembourg is famous.

Morgan, puffing meditatively, walked slowly back, past the garage to the edge of the cliff, and stood for a while looking down at the dim-lit town beneath him. Then, feeling the necessity of some exercise, he paced the length of the lawn again, and stood at the gates looking out across the boulevard.

The hemlock hedge that separated the ground from the road was almost his own height and partly screened it. Morgan was held there, however, by a strange sound, a sort of shuffling of many feet that seemed to come down the road from the westward.

So peculiar was the sound, so unlike anything he had ever heard before that he was on the point of stepping through the gate and looking along the road when a hand was laid on his arm. It was Healy.

"Hold on a minute, doc," said Healy in a low tone. "Just keep quiet and look. There's something doing here that's going to be a surprise to somebody in the boig of Luxemboig."

Morgan looked in the direction Healy indicated. Out of the gloom a gigantic figure slowly took shape as it drew nearer. It was a man mounted on a great, tall horse. The man himself was tall and made taller by the helmet with the square top which he wore. In one hand he carried a long lance with a little pennon at the head. The horse moved at a fast, shuffling

walk, and as he passed them they could see the rider's uniform.

He was a German uhlan, slouching forward in his saddle, leaning a little on the long, black lance whose butt rested in his stirrup iron. They could see from the movements of his head that he was glancing keenly to left and right as well as down the road ahead of him toward the center of the city. Only the fact that they stood behind the hedge and were looking out through its branches saved them from his scrutiny.

For the moment Morgan could scarcely believe his eyes. It was like some ghastly phantom of the night, this Prussian uhlan in the streets of quiet Luxembourg—Luxembourg whose neutrality had been guaranteed by the powers.

It could only mean one thing—war! And war was impossible. Mr. Cameron at dinner had said it was impossible, that the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few great financial interests like those of the Rothschilds made such a thing as a war between the powers in the nineteenth century inconceivable. They might talk and threaten and argue about Slav and Teuton, but look how things had quieted down after the Agadir incident! The bankers had put the screws on the powers in that case and they would do it again.

And yet, here before his very eyes, was a sight that even to Morgan, who had only a superficial knowledge of politics in Europe, meant nothing less than a general war. A Prussian uhlan in the streets of Luxembourg!

A dozen wild thoughts flashed through Morgan's mind. It might be some one masquerading; his eyes might deceive him. But now as the German soldier passed within a foot of them it was evident that it was no vision and no masquerade. The dusty uniform with the yellow facings, the black lance with its little snapping pennon, the short blond mustache, and the heavy, brooding countenance lit up for a second by the lights of the château gate—all these had something in them terribly grim and real.

The uhlan passed, and disappeared into the darkness, the shuffling of his horse growing fainter. Suddenly Morgan felt Healy's grip tighten on his arm as another horseman appeared, exactly like the first. Then came two more, riding side by side, then after that, at a little space, five in a group.

Morgan realized that he was witnessing the advance of some portion of an army and that this cavalry vidette was an advance guard. Speechless, almost breathless, he and Healy stood side by side, watching while a squad of horsemen passed. Five minutes later the columns of infantry appeared.

They were Bavarian troops with fur-trimmed fore-and-aft hats and blue uniforms. Before them marched trumpeters and drummers with odd little, flat German drums, but the trumpets and drums were silent, and the only sound was the stealthy, quick shuffle of many feet in the dusty road, and a low, indistinct murmur made up of the muffled jingling of many accouterments.

It was like a horrible dream. The infantry moved in an uncanny silence and with an uncanny celerity. Rank after rank of bronzed faces swung into the shaft of light from the gate lamps, rank after rank of polished rifle barrels flashed back the light before the darkness swallowed them again.

How long it took, how many men passed, neither Morgan nor Healy was able to closely estimate, but at length the lamps shone on the pennons of a rear guard of uhlans, followed by several great wagons with six horses attached to each.

The shuffling faded farther and farther down the road. The murmur and jingle died into silence, the shadowy

forms of the great wains bulked big for a moment or so in the darkness and then blended into the night even as the creaking of their wheels died away.

It seemed as if they had watched the passing of a phantom host. The road was vacant and quiet once more, the rose scent still hung heavy in the air, the sight that they had just seen seemed an impossibility.

"That's war all right," said Healy. "Those fellows ain't on a practice march or out for a picnic. That's why his nibs, the strong-arm fellow you was wrassling with, went off in such a hurry. And that's where the Dutch butler's gone. They've gone to their regiments."

Morgan turned toward the château. He had some idea of telling Mr. Cameron of what he had seen when he saw the lights suddenly flash up in Mr. Cameron's office, and he realized that Cameron must be already getting the news by wire. At the same time from the air above him came a familiar sound, a drone something like the noise made by a boy drawing a wooden stick along an iron paling.

Morgan had been up once or twice at Hempstead, and could have made a living as an aviator had he needed to. He knew the sound, and a moment later he was able to identify the machine which came sweeping down upon the lawn of the Château des Herthereux.

It was a Bleriot monoplane, and poised now at a tremendous height above the house and city. Suddenly the engine was shut off, the rapid succession of explosions ceased, and Healy and Morgan were treated to the sight of one of the most thrilling and stirring volplanes that was ever executed anywhere. Out of the dark sky the plane seemed to fall like a shot, upward it circled again, carried on by the tremendous momentum of the drop. Again it circled, and again it swung downward. They were watching the evolutions of an aviator who knew his business and had perfect control of his machine even with its motive power shut out.

Another swooping circle and another plunge downward, and both Healy and Morgan were dashing for the lawn behind the barn. The aviator must have picked out this little sloping stretch of green from the air above with a night glass and aimed his frail craft at it with unerring judgment.

As Morgan and Healy, running side by side, passed the barn they came upon him standing beside his machine which stood apparently undamaged on the unscarred turf. He was a lithe, square-shouldered, athletic figure. He flashed a pocket light in their direction.

"Tiens!" he said in a low, ringing voice. *"C'est Luxembourg, n'est ce pas?* Neutral territory?"

"This is Luxembourg, and German troops are crossing it now."

"Ah! The party down the road." He spoke English rapidly and with but a slight accent. "They passed here. Only an outpost. The main division came on the railroad. They are holding the station and the Hotel de Ville now. But you, messieurs, your nationality? English?"

"American," said Morgan.

Something about the tension of the fingers relaxed, and the aviator came closer.

"I am fortunate," he said. "If a detachment of uhlans find me here I shall swing at the end of a rope. I am a spy—according to them. I am not in the regular French army, and I will not even have the privilege of being shot."

As they drew closer to him they saw that in spite of the quietness of his tone his brow was beaded with sweat, the hair was wet and matted on his bare head, and his face was working with excitement. He carried a big, flat automatic pistol in one hand, the pocket

flash in the other, and, suspended before him by a strap about his neck, was a pair of field glasses.

"It is not only my own life that is at stake, gentlemen—it is France itself," he said. "The German armies are at our throat. War is not yet declared, but it is already war. If Paris is to be saved I must leave here and get to Liége to-night. I have no petrol here. My name is Etienne Martin. I was formerly in the employ of the National Telegraphique before I became an aviator. I have many American friends. If France were the aggressor perhaps I would not ask your help so confidently. But I must have petrol."

"How much have we?" asked Morgan, turning to Healy.

"We have enough to help him out—but listen!"

From far off somewhere in the direction of the city came the ringing tones of a bugle. Then another sound from the air smote their ears. It was like the rustling of mighty wings. Over the eastern horizon a long, dark form, lit here and there and with a restless searchlight playing from it, swung up against the sky.

"A Zeppelin!" said Martin. "We must get the machine hidden before that light picks us up."

"That carriage house will hold it," said Healy. "Get a hold of the machine, you, doc, and you, Frenchy, and push it in. I'll push open the doors."

It was Healy's prompt thinking that stirred them to action. The chauffeur himself pushed the sliding doors back, and shoved one or two vehicles back into the barn, while Martin and Morgan guided the light machine from either side. A moment later it was safe within the inclosure which just gave space enough for its wide wings, and the door was swung shut on it. Healy snapped a padlock on the door.

"Nobody will search that barn without chopping down the door," he said. "It's an American lock, and I've got the key. And now you'd better get young Frenchy out of the way. That transatlantic balloon will be here with its flash light in about two minutes."

Morgan led the way to the turret door which he had left open an hour before. From above, from the windows of his darkened bedchamber they could look out on the lawn. The great Zeppelin, long, somber, cigar-shaped, and incredibly fast, was almost above them now. Its powerful searchlight brought into tremendous vividness and relief everything its rays touched. They could see it move across the lawn—a great disk of fiery bluish white—and show nothing there but the orderly flower beds and the close-cropped grass.

The aëroplane had landed lightly after its terrible drop, and its rubber-tired wheels had left no track. Across the face of the barn passed the disk of the searchlight and showed it locked, still, and deserted.

Over the face of the château flashed the light, full in their eyes as it passed their window. For perhaps five minutes it searched the grounds, the boulevard, the cliff at the other side, and the roofs of the town below. Then the great balloon altered its course and swung off farther west and south.

For the moment at least Etienne Martin was safe. And in that moment Morgan had time to realize what he had done in aiding an enemy of Germany, and some of the dangers threatening Healy and himself, even his uncle and Charlotte, perhaps, because of it.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. CAMERON IN THE ROLE OF DIPLOMAT.

The drone of the Zeppelin grew fainter in the distance, its dark bulk faded from the eastern sky. Healy, less imaginative and less concerned with the great world drama that lay be-

hind the present excitement, was cooler and more practical than the other two. He drew down the curtains to the three windows of the turret chamber, and, striking a match, lit the heavy lamp that hung from brazen chains in the center of the room.

Etienne Martin was standing with his arms folded across his breast in an attitude very Gallic and indeed theatrical. There were deep lines of fatigue on his face, his shoulders drooped a little, but his head was carried jauntily.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is for you to say whether I live or die—and whether France lives or dies. A few gallons of petrol for which I will gladly pay any price you ask, a level space where I may start my engine and take the air—that is all I ask. And if you cannot grant it, it means ruin and worse than death to France, and death by the rope for me! Have you ever been in Paris?" He gesticulated as he continued: "Have you ever seen the Bois de Boulogne? Do you want to see it white with the tents of the Prussian troopers? Do you desire to see the Arc de Triomphe stained with our blood and gay with the Prussian battle flags?" He shook his clenched hands in Morgan's face.

"What I want to see and don't want to see," said Morgan, "isn't the only factor in the case. Mr. Cameron, whose hospitality you and I enjoy at the present moment, is the American diplomatic representative to Luxembourg. You realize, of course, that what happens in his house is a different matter from the happenings in the house of an ordinary private citizen. I don't know much about this war, but I do know that the United States is neutral and going to stay neutral, and that it is up to Mr. Cameron to preserve that attitude. This is a case for him to decide. Healy, will you be good enough to ask Mr. Cameron to do me the favor to come up here if he is disengaged? And you, Mr. Martin, you might as well sit down."

Healy vanished, and the aviator collapsed in a limp heap on the edge of the bed. There was something pathetic in his extreme weariness, his anxiety and excitement. His face, handsome and attractive enough in a dark way, was continually working, and his hands were restless.

Mr. Cameron himself appeared at the door a moment later with Healy at his elbow.

"I understand from this person, Fairfax," he said, "that you have a French aviator here. I have just received advices to the effect that Russia and Germany are at war with each other and that Austria and Russia are at war. At present I know of no state of war between Germany and France."

Martin stood up. "You know," he said, "that Luxembourg has been invaded and is now being held by Prussian troops. A squad of uhlans and a battalion of Bavarian infantry passed your own door half an hour ago. What right have they here?"

"It's not my business what they are doing here," said Mr. Cameron. "I know, however, that it is none of my business to be harboring in a house, which is in effect the United States embassy to Luxembourg, a French spy."

Martin dropped on the bed again, and clasped his head with his hands. He uttered some exclamation in French and swayed from side to side.

"That guy is goin' nutty," said Healy. "He's all in! He'll be dead to the woild in a minute."

Mr. Cameron turned on him irritably. "Go and get him a drink, then," he said, and as Healy went he faced Morgan again.

"This is a singularly unfortunate circumstance, Fairfax," he said. "I don't know that I blame you, inasmuch as

this man had committed no crime and his life was at stake. Anyway, I have made up my mind. It may cost me a lot of trouble afterward, but I am an old man and have not much to hope for in the way of advancement. I'm going to wash my hands of the whole affair. It's up to you. I know nothing about it. If you take this man to your machine and sell him a few gallons of gasoline, it is none of my affair and I can't say anything. You don't have to tell me about it. If he uses my lawn to get off into the air again it's not my business. It's up to the Germans to stop that. At any rate, the best thing you can do is to get him out of the house and out of my sight."

He left the room, and Martin, leaning on Morgan's arm, followed him down the stairs to the main hall of the château. It was a big room, with a stone-flagged floor and a gallery around it.

As they reached it, there was a rattle of drums from without, the measured tramp of heavy feet, and the sudden sharp note of a bugle. Healy dashed into the room.

"They're here!" he said. "If young Frenchy is goin' to get a ghost of a show you've got to get him out now."

"Take him to the carriage house," said Mr. Cameron, "and stay there with him."

"Come on, Frenchy," said Healy; "we're on our way. The woild's against you, but we'll save you."

The pair vanished, and as they went the tramp without grew louder, they heard a curt command in German, and the door swung open to admit an officer of uhlans.

He was a blond, good-looking young fellow with a kindly blue eye and a very poor command of English. His clothes were dusty and travel-stained, and he carried his long, straight saber in its sheath under his left arm. The lamplight shone on the glittering metal of his square-topped helmet, and his spurs jingled heavily on the stone flagging. He brought his hand up to his forehead in a stiff salute.

"I am here," he said, "to search for a French aviator. I am Sous-Lieutenant Franz of the Eleventh Uhlans."

"Do you realize that this house is, for the time being, the property of the United States?" snapped Cameron, in whom the situation had aroused a new sharpness and decision.

"We intend no intrusion. The safety of the empire is at stake. I must make a search of the house," said Franz.

"And if I refuse to permit such a search?"

"My orders are to make the search."

"And if I write to my own government, whose relations with yours are friendly, and protest against this as an outrage?"

"My orders are still to make a search."

"You make the search over my protest."

"I am sorry; I am ordered and must obey."

He turned, and called something out in guttural German. A dozen troopers swung through the open doors and came to attention within.

They carried short carbines, and as they grounded them with a rattle on the flagged floor Morgan slipped from the room, quite unnoticed. He gathered from Mr. Cameron's attitude that the old war horse of the diplomatic service was playing bravely for time, and he knew also that there was no time to lose.

He had not been long enough in the château to know its interior arrangements, but he knew enough to go to his own room, from there to descend the stairs and get out on the lawn from the tower door.

Mr. Cameron surveyed the ranks of the uhlans, and scrutinized severely the good-natured face of Lieutenant Franz.

He held himself with a certain dignity that won the respect of the young German.

"I am very sorry, indeed." Franz spoke in his own tongue now, realizing somehow that Cameron would understand it and evidently a great deal more at his ease than when using the medium of a foreign language. "I have my orders. It is for me to obey them. I am to search for a French aviator whose machine was seen falling in this locality."

"Were your orders specific—to search the American legation here?"

"Not specifically—they were to search the vicinity. I take it that this house is included. I cannot afford to make mistakes."

"Lieutenant Franz"—Cameron's tone was quite gentle and patronizing—"aside from the personal inconvenience of having your troops quartered on me and my guests for the greater part of the evening, I don't want to see a young man like yourself make a mistake that may hurt your future. You know, of course, that it is the wish of your government to avoid giving offense to Americans, just as it is our wish to observe a real neutrality and to remember that we must maintain and preserve our feelings of friendliness to both Germany and France."

Lieutenant Franz inclined his head respectfully.

"May I ask you, then, whence your orders came?"

"From the officer in command of the military forces at present disposed and utilized in the peaceful occupation of Luxembourg."

His heels came together, and he drew himself erect.

"May I still further trespass upon your kindness by asking the name of the officer in command? It is possible that I know him."

Lieutenant Franz hesitated for a fraction of a second.

"Count Otto von Hollman," he said finally.

"Count von Hollman is, I think, a friend of mine," said Cameron. "We had the pleasure of his company here for luncheon to-day—this unfortunate exigency deprived us of the pleasure of his society at dinner. Where is he now?"

"At the temporary military headquarters of the German forces engaged in the peaceful occupation of Luxembourg—at the Hotel de Ville." Franz repeated this as if by rote.

"I have a telephone here," said Cameron, "perhaps you could spare the time to call up Count Hollman and tell him where you are."

Franz hesitated. He was plainly torn between a natural good-natured prepossession in favor of the dignified old gentleman and the fear of winning a reprimand by an unmilitary tendency to "reason why," as Tennyson puts it.

It is probable that the sudden appearance of Charlotte Cameron decided him. His eye kindled a little as it fell on her—there was something about her blond face and gentle bearing that appealed to his Germanic mind. The social atmosphere generated by the personality and dignity of Mr. Cameron had exerted its effect on him; now that it was strengthened by the presence of the lovely Miss Cameron he was quite overcome. He bowed gallantly as Mr. Cameron presented him to his niece.

"I will telephone," he said.

Turning, he snapped out an order to his men, who formally "stood at ease," dropping their hands on the muzzles of their short carbines and staring blankly before them. He followed Cameron to his office, where a telephone instrument stood on a corner of the flat-topped desk.

The exchange in Luxembourg was a busy place that night, but it was not long till Charlotte and Mr. Cameron

heard the ring of Count Otto's voice at the other end of the wire.

They both stepped back to the entrance hall to allow Franz to do his telephoning in private, but they could hear enough through the open door to indicate that Hollman was asking many questions.

Lieutenant Franz finally laid down the instrument and appeared before them. There was a troubled expression on his honest, good-natured face.

"I am very sorry," he said. "Count Hollman asks me to beg your forgiveness, but to remind you that the urgency is great. He regrets exceedingly that a thorough search must be made of the house and grounds. He further asks——"

What Hollman had requested further was not to be communicated to Cameron or his niece. Franz interrupted himself suddenly, grasped his saber, and started for the door. From beyond the open window came faintly the rattling sound of the exhaust of a petrol engine, followed by a hoarse shout.

Franz snapped out an order and dashed after his squad of uhlans as they faced about. A medley of noises arose from without. The sound of an aëroplane in flight, a succession of three shots, more shouts, and the sound of a trumpet.

CHAPTER V.

MR. MORGAN DISCOVERS THAT THE KRIEGSPIEL IS A MORE DANGEROUS GAME THAN TENNIS.

When Morgan slipped out of the postern door and stood again on the dark, cool lawn he had a definite idea that if Etienne Martin were to be saved at all from the German troops it must be immediately. It was obvious to him that Mr. Cameron had been sparring for time, and the dignity and readiness of the old gentleman had won his admiration. Sometimes, in the past, he had thought Charlotte's uncle a little inefficient, a little fussy in small ways, a little too punctilious about points of etiquette. In the present instance, however, Robert Cameron had come out glowingly as a real gentleman of the old school. Morgan felt that he himself could not have held the Prussian officer in parley half a minute.

The rose-scented lawn stretched before him quiet and peaceful. The night had grown a little brighter and clearer, and in the east, over the dark shadows of the lime trees, was the slenderest, yellow slip of a rising moon.

There were dark shadows, darker than the trees, thought Morgan, along the boulevard, and he imagined he saw the black lances of uhlans there. Toward the west, however, the lawn lay deserted. Morgan hurried past the barn, and found its doors, which opened on the side toward the cliff and screened from the boulevard, wide open again.

He made out the figure of Martin slumped in a heap on the floor. Healy was busy pouring gasoline through a scoop into the tank of the aëroplane.

"I don't know how much gas this thing uses," he said, glancing up at Morgan, "but I'm sure there's enough there now to carry it from Luxemboig to Leege, if that's where young Frenchy wants to go."

He laid aside the empty can, and turned toward Martin.

"Here!" he said. "Wake up! Here's some American rye. Drink that. We haven't any absinth."

Martin drank from the proffered flask, coughed and spluttered, and arose. He swayed for a moment, but the slight rest seemed to have helped him, and his lithe body seemed to have in it some remarkable recuperative power.

"Couldn't we tumble the machine out over the cliff and hide you here?" suggested Morgan. "The odds are terribly against you, and I don't think that you

are in physical condition to get to Liége or anywhere else in an aëroplane."

Healy was inclined to second his master's suggestion, but Martin, who was rapidly recovering command of his mind and body, shook his head.

"It is imperative that I should reach Liége to-night," he said. "Let me tell you in a word, my friends, some of the secrets of the nations and of the kings. To-night Liége is invested by German troops even as Luxembourg is. It is not known to the world—but France has been preparing for this war which was bound to come. There are French officers at Liége, although the world, the diplomats, do not know it. I—*moi!*—Etienne Martin have gone between them. It was safe for me. It excited less suspicion. I am not in the regular army of France—I am but an employee of the Telegraphique National who has turned aviator. That's why, if the Germans should take me here, I would hang by the rope and not be sent to Berlin as the prisoner of war."

He paused to take another pull at Healy's flask, and to don an aviator's helmet and goggles which he carried fastened to his belt. Healy by this time had lighted a stable lantern and was examining the strange mechanism of the monoplane, with its frail outstretching wings and its circular Gnome engine.

"There is time for but a word more," said Martin, handing back the flask and speaking quickly. "If I am at Liége to-night, Paris—France is saved from the blow which is aimed at her heart and which is at this moment ready to fall. To-morrow General von Emmich will call upon Liége to surrender to allow the passage of German troops. Those at Liége think that the Germans are there in force, that their siege guns are there, that they can batter down their forts and burn the city with shells from across the river.

"I, Etienne Martin, know better! The main German force is *here;* Germany aims at the heart of France through Luxembourg, but first she hopes to take Liége by assault. If I arrive not at Liége the town will be abandoned to the Germans. If I arrive there to tell them of the disposition of the German forces Liége will not surrender and the Germans cannot march through Luxembourg till Liége or Belgium has been won."

He made a sudden dash at Healy, and, to the great astonishment of that individual, hugged him to his breast and kissed him enthusiastically on both cheeks.

"I embrace thee!" he cried. "My friend, and the friend of *la patrie!*"

"Cut it out!" yelled Healy, shoving him away.

Etienne, nothing disconcerted, staggered gayly toward his machine. A moment later the engine was going and he was in the aviator's seat.

The machine went slithering unsteadily down the slope from the barn, a dark, weird shape in the half light. Then the engine sputtered and stopped while Etienne worked frantically with spark and lever.

Healy and Morgan dashed after it. As he ran a sound caused Morgan to turn and look back. A dark, tall shadow approached across the lawn. Morgan's heart was in his throat. He could see the lance, the trooper's helmet. He could hear now the guttural noise from his throat as the uhlan, who had evidently leaped his horse over the hemlock hedge, spoke to his animal.

The engine spluttered again, and there was an explosion from a back fire. The shadowy form of the trooper straightened up, Morgan saw him rein in his horse.

The engine burst forth again in a succession of explosions, and the uhlan suddenly came forward at a gallop. The long lance was poised, and though the machine was now running easily

down the grassy slope, the horseman was moving faster still and was almost upon it. Morgan saw the heavy trooper raise himself in the saddle, and knew that but the winking of an eyelid saved Martin from the furious thrust of that iron lance through his back.

He scarcely knew what he did, but in some mad impulse flung himself forward, seized the bridle reins of the uhlan's horse, and dragged down on them with all his force. Morgan was a strong, big-boned, powerful man, and his strength was exerted to the utmost. He was more use in an emergency of this kind than in a trial of skill with Count Otto. He was sent staggering, but he kept his feet, and the tall, raw-boned horse half turned about, staggered in turn, almost fell, and reared up suddenly.

The trooper had already raised himself in his stirrups and thrown himself forward in preparation to striking the aëroplane with his lance. His horsemanship and training were faultless, but now he had lost his seat and he was stiff, heavy, and clumsy. The lance struck the ground and bent beneath him, and the rider plunged headforemost over his horse's head.

Morgan, as he released the reins and dodged away from the flashing, stabbing hoofs of the frantic horse, saw him hit the turf, half roll over in a sort of somersault, and fall in a huddled heap. The chin strap to his helmet had broken, and the helmet rolled away from him across the grass.

In the meantime the aëroplane had gathered way. Morgan turned to look at it as the freed horse dashed off behind him and cleared the hemlock hedge once more in a frantic leap. The plane was running down the grassy slope nearer and nearer to the edge of the cliff. It was going slowly, without enough apparent driving power to lift it. It seemed as if Martin with all his hopes and fears for France had escaped the uhlan's lance only to be dashed to pieces at the foot of the cliff.

At the very last moment, however, the guiding planes swung upward, the machine drove clear from the ground and into the air. It hung, it swayed, it dove downward suddenly, and then righted itself as suddenly. The engine began to sputter more evenly, the machine circled, teetered, drove upward.

But Martin's danger was not yet passed. From the eastward appeared another plane, bigger, wider, evidently more powerful than Martin's, with drooping, trailing wings. As it swung past above them it was evident that there were two men in it. One of them was aiming a rifle at Martin's machine. Twice it flashed, and twice the sharp report floated down to them. Once or twice they could see a flash from the Frenchman's machine, and knew that he was returning the fire with his revolver. He shot about in a wider circle and presently appeared again, flying due northwest and slightly higher than the German machine, which Morgan identified as a Rumpler "Dove," and which followed it like a bird of prey.

It was a thrilling little drama they had witnessed, and the excitement of it, the desperate energy and determination evident on both sides made them forget some of the things nearer to themselves. For the moment they forgot the senseless trooper who lay beside them in a grotesque attitude on the grass; they forgot the riderless horse that had leaped the hedge, and they forgot the German soldiers who must be ranked on the road only a thousand yards away.

Healy, being a polyglot individual, was able to misuse more languages than most educated people.

"En avang, Etienne, mong brave gar!" he said. "Our gas didn't suit his carburetter, but it's sparking all right now and he's going to give that Goiman machine a chase."

At the same moment the squad of uhlans on foot dashed around the corner of the house, and both Morgan and Healy were seized and held. Lieutenant Franz followed later, and, pursuing him, running across the lawn, came an infantry officer wearing the squat, spiked helmet and dark service clothes of a line regiment.

"Lieutenant Franz!" he said; "you allowed, by your delay, a foreign aviator to escape from this place."

"My orders were to be courteous and to ask permission to search first," said Franz sullenly.

"Enough!" said the officer. "Bring these men to the house."

Healy and Morgan were marched along, each with a soldier on either side. When they reached the porch the new infantry officer faced them. He was a heavy man, with a pale, flabby face and cold gray eyes. He studied them as they stood under the porch lights, each with a trooper on either side.

"Who was the man who escaped in the aëroplane?" he said at length.

Before Morgan could answer him Healy's native impertinence asserted itself.

"His name," said Healy, "is Rougemont la Rochefoucauld; but we call him 'Young Frenchy' for short."

The Prussian officer's answer to this was to reach forward and strike Healy across the face heavily with his open hand. Morgan, who at times had little enough patience with Healy's good-natured effrontery, felt his blood boil. He started forward, but was checked, not by the restraining hand of the soldier on either side of him, but by the appearance of another officer of high rank who had descended from a motor car on the driveway and now stepped silently upon the porch.

He was dressed in the dark uniform and black busby of a colonel of hussars and carried a sword. There was something authoritative, quiet, and menacing in his bearing.

Morgan was not surprised when the officer turned to face him under the porch light to find himself gazing into the inscrutable eyes of Count Otto von Hollman.

"So, my friend," he said softly, "it is you! You would have done better to have remained with your golf and tennis than to have taken up the *kriegspiel*. It is a game for grown men."

"Why am I being held here?" said Morgan.

"You are under arrest—you and your chauffeur."

"Is that why this brute," he indicated the infantry officer, "strikes my chauffeur in the face while there are two men holding him?"

"Von Graf!" Hollman turned to the infantry officer. "Have I not told you before that brutality and ill temper will ruin you? Back to your men!"

Von Graf saluted and withdrew. Hollman, scarcely acknowledging the salute, turned to bow profoundly to Mr. Cameron and Charlotte, who appeared on the porch.

"I came," he said, "as soon as I could after the telephone message of Lieutenant Franz, Mr. Cameron. I am sorry that this has occurred. It would have been better if you had allowed the search at once. It might have saved me the painful necessity of placing your guest and this other man under arrest."

"Under arrest!" said Cameron. "I feel that I have a right to protest. It is only a temporary embarrassment, perhaps, but it is needless."

"It is more than a temporary embarrassment, I fear," said Hollman, "and it is most needful. There are grave charges against Mr. Morgan."

"What?" said Cameron. "Suppose a Frenchman did escape from this lawn. Was it Mr. Morgan's place as a neutral

to detain him? Germany and France are not yet at war."

"Germany and France have been at war for an hour, but that is not the gravest charge against your guest. A moment ago Private Strassman of the eleventh regiment of uhlans was found insensible on your lawn. His horse has vanished. His lance lay beside him, bent and useless. He is seriously hurt. He was a brave man, who was trying to stop a French spy. Your guest met him in the performance of his duty. He threw him from his horse. If Private Strassman dies your guest, a non-combatant, has brought about the death of a German soldier while engaged in obeying the commands of the emperor and the performance of his duty. That charge is sufficiently grave, I think."

As in a horrible dream Morgan saw Mr. Cameron's face grow pale, and saw Charlotte's eyes widen in horror. He knew enough of the laws of war and of the inexorable rule of the German troops to know that the fate that he had feared for Etienne Martin now hung darkly over himself and Healy. He looked about him in a sort of daze. He was hemmed in by men. He could see the bayonets of the infantry, and behind them the black, pennoned lances of the cavalry.

The whole afternoon was a horrible nightmare. Five hours ago he had been a peaceful American with no thought more disturbing than the losing of a tennis tournament or the miscarriage of a bag of golf clubs.

And now! Now the rope was almost at his throat and at Healy's. And besides, what trouble his rash action had brought upon Cameron! What anxiety and what cares upon Charlotte and others he could only dimly foreshadow.

It was with a chilled and heavy heart that he turned from his host and moved toward the car with leaden steps, a soldier urging him forward on either side. His own rashness, his own folly had led him into this.

And yet it was hard to imagine Martin strung up, a dark figure at the end of a rope. And now that same fate threatened him! He was stunned and speechless as the car set off down the Boulevard Adalbert toward the Hotel de Ville.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The second part of this novel will appear in the next issue of the POPULAR, out November 7th.

ACCIDENTAL EVIDENCE

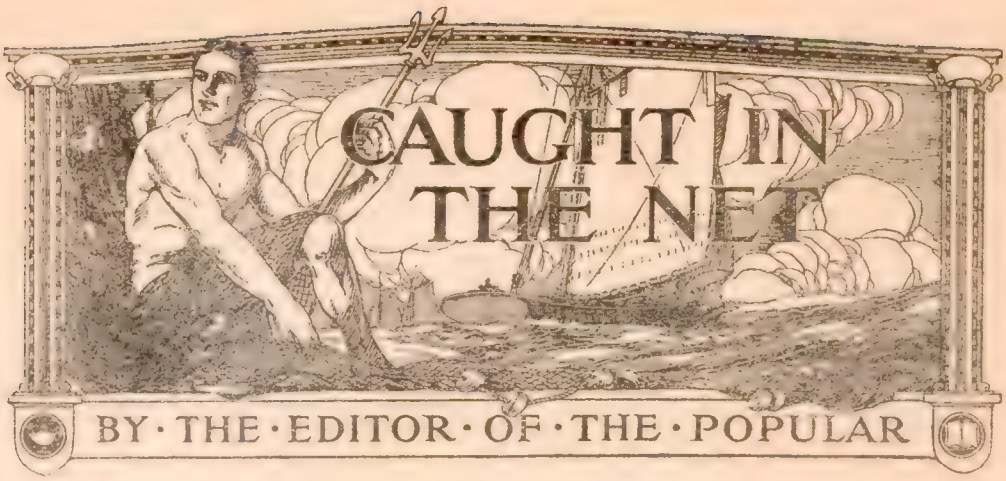
JOHN E. WILKIE, who used to be chief of the United States secret service, was discussing one night celebrated cases which have been decided by "accidental evidence"—that is, important facts brought out through no efforts of detectives. Such things, he said, were like the story of the little girl who contributed an unexpected piece of evidence.

Mr. Smith went home one evening and found his wife talking to the ten-year-old daughter of a neighbor. He also found that Mrs. Smith had purchased for him a handsome silver-headed walking stick.

"I really hadn't intended to get this for you," Mrs. Smith explained, "but I saw it in a pawnshop window marked a dollar and a half, and I just had to get it."

"Well," said Smith, "that was a great bargain to pick up in a pawnshop."

"Pawnshop!" echoed the little girl. "That's where all of my mother's rings are!"



HONESTY

BISMARCK was the maker of many treaties. He summed up his opinion of them once: "Treaties cease to be valid when the private interests of those who lie under them no longer reinforce the text."

This is still true of agreements between nations. No matter how carefully drawn a treaty may be, no matter what weeks or months of wrangling may have preceded its signing, if, at some time in the future, it does not suit with the selfish desires of one nation or the other, it is figuratively "torn up." Treaties, after all, are like civil law—which is always superseded by martial law when an emergency arises.

But if nations keep to their written pledges with each other only so long as may be convenient, the percentage of oathbound honesty among individuals is far higher than it used to be. This is especially obvious in the treaties of industry—the agreements between employers and employed as to hours and wages. In labor disputes arbitration is outgrowing war.

Not so very many years ago in this country, when each individual had to do his own bargaining about getting and holding his job, employer and employee were equally guilty. Later came the rise of the great labor unions and of collective bargaining. The old spirit still remained, and pledges continued to be as breakable as pie crust. But in the present generation a better class of men has arisen as leaders on both sides. Responsibilities are more clearly realized. There have been labor wars, but they are smaller and farther apart than they used to be. While the golden age of industry is still distant, it is nearer than it was a quarter of a century ago.

All this has come about, in the last analysis, through the growth of a sturdy spirit of individual honesty in business and in life generally. It is becoming a twenty-four-hour habit with the majority. We have practically lived down the "wooden nutmeg" and "shoepeg" oats days, which gave "Yankee smartness" an unpleasant name among our national neighbors. To-day goods of American manufacture bring higher prices, in many instances, in the markets of the world because their quality is beyond question, and is jealously maintained. Each buyer knows that there is a binding though unwritten treaty between the maker

and himself that extends around the world. We have been proving, not by organized effort, but as a natural inclination, the business value of honesty as a policy.

A PURE-CHILD BILL

IN many industries children are more serviceable for some forms of work than adults. This is particularly true in the textile mills, where the nimble fingers of a child can do with ease what the comparatively clumsy fingers of the grown persons find difficult. In the Southern cotton-mill towns, whole families of "poor whites" settle in the manufacturing sections and live on the labor of their children. Among this class are the "dinner toters," fathers who carry the midday meal to their children at work in the mills, and then go back to doze in the sunshine.

There is a bill before Congress, drawn on the general lines of the pure-food law, which might be termed the pure-child law. It seeks to prohibit the employment of children under fourteen years in manufacturing occupations, and to limit the work of children under sixteen to eight hours a day.

One of the most forceful arguments that will be presented in its support comes from the investigation made by Professor Rock Sleyster, of Chicago, into the cases of 269 murderers. He shows that fifty-five per cent of the 269 were wage earners before they were twelve years old, and more than ninety per cent were toilers before they were fifteen. Association with men at an age when they should be at school or at play, the hearing of stories corrupting to childish minds, and the destruction of the moral fiber at the most impressionable stage of life are ascribed as the causes of criminal development in most of these cases.

The industrial wealth of a country is its human timber more than its purely material resources. If this is lessened in quality by the laboring of children it is an economic as well as a human waste.

THE ROMANCE OF OKLAHOMA

HISTORY is made so fast in the Western Hemisphere that people lose the proper perspective. Mighty changes take place without the public appreciating what is happening. Few things more remarkable than the transformation in that stretch of prairie bounded on the east by Arkansas, on the west by New Mexico, on the south by Texas, and on the north by Kansas have occurred.

It is not long since it was known as the Indian Territory—the asylum of the bulk of the fast-disappearing tribes of red men.

In 1895 some oil gushed out of the earth on an Indian's homestead, and that year 37 barrels of oil were marketed. This year the oil production of that territory is estimated at 100,000,000 barrels. On July 1 one corporation, the Prairie Oil & Gas Co., had 46,032,815 barrels of oil in storage tanks. One great section that was twelve years ago the hunting ground and the ranch land of the tribesmen is now a network of pipe lines.

Seven years ago the territory came into the Union as Oklahoma. The whites far outnumber the reds to-day. Cities have sprung up like magic. Probably nowhere in the world has there been so complete a revolution within a generation.

Marvelous as has been the growth of the oil industry, the farming development has almost been as rapid. In wheat alone Oklahoma last year produced 58,000,000 bushels. This year's yield is expected to exceed that huge total by millions of bushels. Within fifteen years Oklahoma is expected to rival Kansas for the wheat crown. In coal the production last year was 4,797,799 tons.

With cheap fuel in what is believed to be inexhaustible quantities, the ardent Oklahoman sees a new turn in affairs that will make his State the Pennsylvania of the West, with another Pittsburgh to rise perhaps where the land is still unbroken, with steel mills and smelters, mines and factories, and work for countless thousands.

The Indian has seen the transformation with stolid eyes. Thousands of his people have been made suddenly wealthy by the rentals from oil found on their lands or from cities that have sprung up in their pastures. Per capita the members of the Osage Tribe are the plutocrats of America.

Yet to the Indian the Romance of the Rise of Oklahoma is a tragedy. What is progress to the white is a hastening of the end of the red man. But it is destiny.

THE OCEAN HOTEL

THE management of an ocean liner is no less a problem in hotel keeping, restaurant service, and barroom detail than in seamanship. The biggest hotel in the world does not measure up with the biggest liner in the matter of eating and drinking.

In the last fiscal year one of the companies in the transatlantic passenger express service paid for fresh meat $2,111,250; for fish, $737,750; for game, $531,000; for fresh vegetables, $163,000; for preserves, $313,250; while miscellaneous articles of food ran the food bill up to $2,662,750 more.

The passengers consumed 7,801,604 eggs, 2,925,287 oranges, and 1,000,000 apples and pears. They drank 36,661 bottles of champagne, 168,516 bottles of other wines, 291,998 bottles of beer, and 2,214,641 quarts of beer in kegs, in addition to 428,914 bottles of mineral water.

While the total bill for food and drink amounted to $6,519,000, the cost of all the food that the people ate and all the drink that they guzzled was exceeded by the cost of all the coal that the leviathians consumed in order to make the speed that is necessary to ocean travel these days.

Into the fire boxes of the big liners of this one company 1,743,016 tons of coal, for which the company paid $7,581,370, were shoveled.

So the food bill of boats and passengers may be put at $14,287,868.

LESSONS FROM BIG BUSINESS

THE farmer—without knowing it—has been teaching the American people one of the best lessons they have ever had—the value of thoroughness in business. This year's bumper crops hung up a new record. Probably they will be exceeded next year or the year after, and in the years to come. They are the result of increasing thoroughness, of steady, careful planning, of studying every move, of never being dissatisfied, but always unsatisfied. There has been no manufacturing more ably conducted as a whole than that of the

soil. The farmer has become a practical business man, keen to take advantage of everything in science, a student of efficiency, of everything, in fact, that will decrease his operating expenses and increase his profits.

Thoroughness really consists in learning all that can be learned about the business or work that one is engaged in. Its especial value is that it eliminates to a great extent the element of risk that attaches to any work or enterprise. The reason that great businesses or industries succeed, as a rule, is not because of their size and power, but because they make a study of the smallest details—the little items that become big ones on the ledger when the year's accounts are cast up.

Some big commercial firms, for instance, spend thousands of dollars in having their representatives make a careful personal study of crop conditions throughout the country where they sell their goods. They manufacture, buy, sell, and plan generally upon the basis of the information thus gathered.

The small merchant can be similarly thorough in a way that is adapted to the extent of his business. So can the individual, no matter what work he is engaged in. He should be continually eager for accurate information. He should realize that almost every man he comes in contact with can add something to his store of knowledge. Of course, there will have to be much sifting of the chaff to get the wheat, but the golden grains are there, and can be found by thoroughness. And when they are gathered, weighed, and valued it will be found that they are grains of gold indeed.

THE DECAY OF CENTRAL

A LEADING dramatic event of the London season just ending was the spontaneous and tumultuous applause that greeted the disconnection of the telephone in the last act of "Break the Walls Down." As one critic put it: "Up to that moment everybody had lived on the telephone." For perhaps five years, our playwrights have been solving their dramatic tangles by ringing up a number. The telephone has taken the place of the monologue and the aside. If a character wished to tell who he is, or explain his position in the plot, or explicate the making of the will, the family history of the hero, the value of the inherited jewels, the sort of person the villain must impress the audience as being, he sat down in the right front and lifted the coil of wire, and poured out his lonely story for five minutes of undramatic confession. It has been used to render character sketches of each of the dramatis personæ, to tell in narrative form what should have been revealed in action, to comment on situations which should have carried their own footnotes. The tinkle of the bell was becoming as easy a device for reaching the nerves of the audience as stage thunder, church bells, or a pistol shot.

It was welcomed as an escape from dramatic limitation, a glad, new widening of the field of action. The serving line in tennis might as well be wiped out, in order to brighten the game. Now that an audience has voiced its fatigue, there will be less of the "Yes—yes—go on. This is Roy Cholmondeley speaking. Cholmondeley—Roy Cholmondeley—May Paxton's guardian. Yes—Cholmondeley, the attorney at law." What Barrie's skit did not accomplish in laughing the metal mouthpiece off the stage, the first-night audience has brought about by one of those swift focuses of instinct. And once again the feebler dramatists will have to play the game according to rules.

Purty-Fer-Nice

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Flying U Ranch," "The Uphill Climb," Etc.

A story of the Lovelock Ranch. How an Eastern girl—Miss Purty-Fer-Nice as the cowboys called her—essayed to make the Westerners conform to her Eastern standards of living. There's a moral to the tale—particularly for the women readers.

AS it was told to me at divers times and in various places, by the old foreman of the Lovelock Ranch, I shall give you the story. If you are a moralist you may discover in it a nice problem in ethics—and you may not. If you have known such a man as the foreman himself, you may appreciate his point of view and sympathize with his problem, and perhaps you will call him an honest man when you are done with him. A prophet once told a lie to save himself and his friends, and God smiled and let it pass—seeing the prophet was saved. And when the foreman of the Lovelock told me his story, I also smiled and liked him better for the thing he had done.

Picture him a bit stiffened, so that he got up with his palms against the small of his back—that was lumbago, that gave him "cricks." Picture his face seamed and tanned and a bit shriveled—that was his range diploma, hung above the wrinkled collar of his shirt to prove he was a friend of the sun and the sage and the whooping west winds. Picture his squinty eyes a-twinkle and his head cocked sidewise and a cigarette hanging precariously on his under lip—that was his shrewdness measuring my humanness to see if it was big enough to take hold of the real bigness of the story. Picture his legs bowed—that was from the saddle. And if you can hear his voice with the calm dispassionateness of one who has passed so far along the trail that he can afford to smile at past prejudices, and with the chuckling note to prove he saw the humor of them, I think you will have a fair idea of the erstwhile foreman of the Lovelock. And so he may tell you what he told me, about Purty-fer-nice—and that, if you please, was the only name he ever called her. I don't know what her first name was; I never heard it.

Do you know, I've got a sneaking notion that folks back East are just as benighted and just as narrow and just as pig-headed as us boneheads out here in the sage, that ain't supposed to know anything but riding and roping and shooting out the lights in saloons and making tenderfeet dance when they don't want to. I may be wrong, but I ain't never found it out if I am. If I was going to make a break for the tall houses I'd try and git on a street car without grabbing for a horn to swing on by, and remember to keep my knife outa my mouth and my feet offn the table; and I'd leave my chaps and spurs

in the bunk house till I got back. I'd play the game the way they play it, as near as I could. And I wouldn't be too swell-headed to take a few pointers if somebody wanted to hand 'em out.

But a lot of folks come out here from the East and try to work us over so we'll line up with what they've been used to. That's the point I'm getting at. They don't give a darn about conditions being different. We've got to line up to their chalk mark, or we don't make any kind of a hit with them. They don't stop to think that our environment produced us. They don't take into consideration, for instance, that most of us live right under our John B. Stetsons eighteen hours outa the twenty-four, and that we live with both hands full most of the time, so we can't unload and take our hats off if we happen to meet a woman unbeknownst. Them's the women; they call you a low brute if you meet them any way but bareheaded—at any rate, Miss Purty-fernice called me that.

First time I seen her—I'll never forget that if I outlive every tooth I got in my head—I insulted her till she was plumb aching to see me suffer, which I done. I'll tell yuh how the play come up; and, mind you, I ain't so narrow but what I can see her viewpoint. What made me sore was that she couldn't see mine. Long as she lives, I reckon, she'll hold it against me, whereas I don't hold any grudge atall. That goes to show I've got a right to call them Easterners narrow in their views; she ain't the only one; they's plenty more where she come from that's wearing the same brand.

She was teaching school over by Cottonwood Creek. Boarded at the Miller Ranch and drove to school every day in an old buggy and that white horse Jim McGuire used to own. You know the one I mean—the one that piled Bobby into the bobwire fence that Fourth. Well, Miller got hold of him. He got stove up in the shoulders and Miller kept him for the womenfolks to hack around with, and so this schoolteacher, she drove him to school; couple or three miles it was.

I was handling the lines on the Lovelock then. I wasn't so stove up, though, and I had more hair and more teeth, and I considered myself in the running when it came to womenfolks, and didn't back down from nothing I met up with in the trail. Horses, whisky, hard work—they was all welcome and met with a smile of honest joy. I ride around all three now'days.

Well, I was coming out from town with a load of lumber and bobwire. It wasn't my job, but the fellow that went in after the load leaned over the bar an hour or so too long, and got in a fight and was licked. I left him laid up for repairs in Jack Moore's back room, and took the team out myself, leaving my horse for Scotty to ride when he got able. He was a good man, and we needed him on the ranch, so I treated him white.

We had a new horse that we was working that day. Big, shiny bay that I got stung with—I admit it. Johnny Lovelock, he came to me and asked me what I thought about the bay, and I looked the horse over, helped hitch him up, and drove him around the ranch, and told Johnny to freeze onto him. I admit it, I was plumb fooled on that animal. Hadn't a blemish on him; had good life and style and was gentle to handle. And seeing Johnny was trading off old Goodeye, it looked like pickings. I drove along easy—Scotty's flare-up had kept me kinda late in town—and thought what a good trade me and Johnny had made; me, because Johnny never went aginst my advice but twice in his life. . . . Them times I'm going to tell about.

I was feeling good. I'd had a shot or two myself—just enough to make my many virtues stand out prominent be-

fore my admiring contemplation, and my faults wizzle up till they needn't be dwelt on. I guess maybe you know the feeling. I was tickled to death to realize what a helenall good man I was, but I wasn't drunk. Nobody—not even a wife, if I'd had one—could have accused me of not being sober. I just felt good and satisfied with myself.

Not to be too lengthy on the preamble, I got to the foot of the hill just the other side of the Cottonwood schoolhouse, when I come out of my pleasant musings. There was a chuck hole there; nothing to speak of—just a chuck hole, and an uphill pull to git out. I was admiring the sunset, and the team was plugging along steady as sheep, so I didn't see this hole, and let a wheel drop into it. Horses stopped, and I chirked at Bell, and she went into the collar—Bell was a good, true puller; she almost made it alone. But she couldn't quite cut the mustard. The chuck hole was on Prince's side.

Prince—say, I feel like cussing now when I think of it! Man or beast, I do most mortally hate a quitter. Prince was like lots of folks I've had truck with—the meanest kind there is to deal with. Long as things went smooth, he was fine and dandy; git in a pinch and he'd fly back. Balked right there, and it getting sundown, and me ten miles from supper and three from the nearest ranch. Oh, it wasn't a real storybook kinda misfortune. There wasn't any howling blizzard, nor any cold rain—it was kinda spring weather that makes the curlews and meadow larks happy and sets 'em planning about where they'll build their nest this year.

You know how it is, though, when you're awful contented—whisky content—and something goes wrong; you git a jolt that throws you plumb to the other extreme. I got mad. A balky horse always makes me mad, and I was all the madder because I'd been crowing how me and Johnny had stung old Jimpson on that horse trade.

Pull? That bay horse was so scared he might accidentally pull that wheel outa the hole that he set on the doubletree—except times when I'd lift him off it with the whip, and then he'd stand up a while on his hind legs till he got tired enough to set down again.

Well, I was setting up there calling him names and gitting madder the more I called him, when I seen a shadow crawl up alongside the wagon and stop. This was a horse's shadow, and I whirled around with my mouth open, ready to swear some thankfulness that help had come—and I seen it was the schoolmarm driving home from school and looking like she'd stirred up a polecat's nest inadvertant. Shocked? Wow-w!

I guess maybe my voice had carried my language quite a piece down the road; I got good lungs, and I was purty mad. And I guess my face was purty red when I seen her. And then I remembered that I hadn't been blaggarding none—a man hates like sin to be caught at that—but just damning things fast and furious, and I felt better. Any woman can excuse a man cussing a balky horse, I should think. If they can't, they'd oughta be caught in a chuck hole themselves with supper ten miles off and night coming on, and learn Christian charity.

That old white horse stopped dead still and commenced to switch his tail contented. You know how it is out here; horses git the habit of stopping when they meet anybody in the trail, because folks have to be purty mad or after the doctor or ahead of the sheriff when they won't stop long enough to pass the time a day and show they're human, anyway. Schoolmarm clucked at him like a hen partridge, and shoved on the lines—you know the way most women drive a horse!—and tried to pass me up like a white chip in a dol-

lar-ante game. But old White never budged; he knowed his training better than she did, and I cut in with a polite how de do, and asked her would she please tell Miller, when she got home, to come with his team and help me up the hill. That wasn't much to ask, you'd think—just to give a message for me when she got to where she was headed for.

I guess you've seen women like her. She stood about five feet tall, maybe, and weighed about as much as a sack of oats. She had on a white dress and white slippers and a white hat with thin stuff bunched up on it, and a gold chain around her neck with a gold cross the length of my thumb hanging down like a fancy martingale. She had pale-blue eyes and freckles purty much covered up with powder, and she was driving with white silk gloves on that come up over her elbows and showed a ridge on her arm that I took for a bracelet as big around as a harness ring, and bunches on her fingers where she had rings. She wore a thin white veil that didn't do no good, far as I could see, but git in her mouth when she went to talk—oh, you've seen 'em back East a-plenty. Out West they don't belong, somehow. Her neck was about as big as my wrist, here, and about as long, and her head was tilted up like one of them dolls in a Christmas-store window. That's how she looked.

She puckered up her mouth and says: "I refuse to carry a message for any man that curses poor dumb animals and does not show enough respect for a lady to remove his hat when he speaks to her in the road." And she shoves on old White's lines and tries to drive on past me as haughty as she feels.

Now, I'd been as polite as circumstances and my disposition would let me be. One of our own women, that's been raised out here, would have hit the trail for help, or else offered the use of her horse if he was a good true puller, or *looked* sympathetic, anyway. She mighta laughed—women generally do when a man gits in a fix like that—but she'd 'a' done what she could to help out, and she wouldn't 'a' blamed me none for cussing that horse. I'd said how de do to this lady, and I'd looked ashamed of myself fer swearing. But I didn't drop whip and lines to lift my hat to her, and so I was in bad from the first jump. Think of a woman that wouldn't deliver no message because I hadn't took off my hat to her, and had swore when I never knew she was anywheres around!

"Looky here," I said to her, kinda tart. "It ain't going to hurt you none to tell Miller what I asked you to tell him. You're headed for the ranch, I know for a fact; I know that old horse," I says, "and I know all Miller's folks, and you ain't one of 'em. You're the schoolmarm that boards there, ain't you?"

She gave another partridge cluck to old White and pinches in her lips, and then has to twist 'em up to git the veil outa the way so she can talk. "I object to being called 'schoolmarm,'" she said to me, like she was telling me why I had to stay in at recess. "And I shall not deliver any message for you. I have no sympathy for any one who uses curse words."

That made me sore. "Well," I fired back, "drive on, then, Miss Purty-fer-nice, and git over the hill as quick as you can. Because what you heard accidental ain't a commencement to what you'll have to listen to if you stick around here. I'll give you two minutes," I said to her, "to git outa ear-shot; and then I'm going to cut loose. I'm in a helenall fix," I said, "and I'm ten miles from supper and hungry as a wolf. And," I said as sarcastic as I could, "don't worry none about the sympathy, Miss Purty-fer-nice. I guess I'll live just as long without it. You better git a move on—them curse words

is coming; I can feel 'em boiling up inside of me."

Say, she was sure hostile then! She commenced to cluck and slap old White on the rump with first one line and then the other, and when I asked her should I give him a cut with the whip she turned red as a beet, and says, "No, you needn't!" like she wanted to bite my head off. "I never seen such a low brute as you are," she says; and got White going, and then drove off up the hill, and never looked back. I'll bet she was madder than what I was—and that's going some.

She didn't carry any message for me, anyway. I'll say one thing for Purty-fer-nice; she always stuck to her word, and if she ever told you flat-footed that she wouldn't do a thing, you could bank on it not being done. I know I kept looking up that hill while I was unloading the bobwire, kinda expecting to see Miller heave in sight. But he didn't show up, and so I had all the fun of taking off half my load, prying the wheel outa that chuck hole, backing up the wagon—mostly by hard labor on my part—loading up again, and persuading that new horse to help Bell take the load up the hill.

I done it, a-course; there wasn't any quitters on the Lovelock then, except that horse. And I kept my mouth shut when I got to the ranch, and never told anybody but Johnny about the new horse being balky. So, using good judgment and not saying anything, we got rid of him all right. Johnny he drove to town with Prince and the light rig, and let the feller that owned the livery stable coax him into trading for that big roan we had till the outfit was sold out. So we come out all right on the horse, after all. The roan was a jim-dandy on the ranch, and seeing he had a contracted hoof Johnny got some boot on the deal.

Well, I told Johnny, as I said, about me gitting stuck in that chuck hole. It tickled him to death, the way that schoolmarm called me down, and what does he do but just naturally hunt trouble, gitting acquainted with her and pumping her about me, just to see what she'd have to say, so he could devil me about it.

It was at a dance he done this. All us fellows went, a-course, and first off I spotted the schoolmarm, all in white, with her big bracelet sliding up and down her arm and her big eyes sizing up the layout solemn as a preacher and about as disapproving, and her hair pompadoured up to the last notch and her waist squeezed in till you could buckle your hatband around her easy.

"There's Miss Purty-fer-nice, Johnny," I said to him, soon as we was inside. "Over there by the organ. Yuh want to ride away around her, son, 'cause she's down on human men like a wolf. Don't let her git you the way she got me—and call you a low brute just because you're a live male being and no angel with wings." And that done the business. While I was gitting a pardner, he loped right over and got old lady Miller to introduce him.

He claimed afterward he just done it for a josh, to see what she'd say about me; and if he come anywheres near telling the truth, what she said was a-plenty. He tried to git me to go over and git introduced and square myself. But I never had to hunt long or hard for pardners in them days—well, I don't yet, far as that goes, when I take a notion to dance—and I told him I hadn't lost no schoolmarm. So I never did git acquainted with her officially, as you might say, all that spring and summer. I got into the same set with her once or twice that night, I recollect, and when it was "balance, swing," I swung her with the ends of my fingers; and in the "grand-right-and-left" we walked around each other without touching. That goes to show how bad we was stuck on each other.

Johnny, he was different. I always thought, and I think now, that he done it for devilment at the start.

He called her Miss Purty-fer-nice, same as the rest of us, and he kinda grinned whenever he saddled up and rode off with his town clothes on, like it was all a josh—his going to see her about once a week. He never said nothing against her; Johnny Lovelock wasn't that kinda man; he'd 'a' licked anybody that done anything but just plain, harmless joshing about a decent girl, and he wasn't the kind to make remarks about any girl he called on. But looks is plain talk, and can't be repeated; and Johnny, he gave me to understand right along that he felt the same as I did about the schoolmarm, except he could play the game her way and kinda enjoyed doing it once in a while. She wasn't popular, anyway, and I guess Johnny was about the only feller that went to see her atall.

Oh, yes, I know schoolmarms are always heart smashers in storybooks; you can take a girl from the East and bring her out West to teach school, and let a cow-puncher meet up with her in the trail, and you've got the poor devil's heart roped and tied down in about three-fifths of a second. But I never seen it work out that way many times, except on paper.

Men ain't going to fall over each other being attentive to a girl that goes along with her nose in the air, and teaches school in white dresses and white slippers, and has powder on her face so thick you could write your name on her nose with your finger. A feller feels like he's got to watch his grammar, and be sure he don't set down anywhere while she's standing up, and all that junk. And that's wearing on a man that ain't broke to it. It's like taking a range horse and trying to work him with one of them overhead check-reins drawn tight as a fiddle string. Town horses git used to 'em, and town men git broke in to the parlor game; but it's hard on prairie men and cayuses to be checked up too high—they're liable to bolt or kick over the tongue or something.

Took her about six months to rope Johnny in, and she wouldn't have done it then, I guess, if he hadn't happened along with her mail the time she got word her mother'd died. Johnny was always a sympathetic cuss, and I take it Purty-fer-nice shed some tears on his shirt front before Johnny give in. Don't matter, anyway, how she got him; she done it, and that's what puts the kibosh on many a good feller. It ain't the woman trying to git him—it's her succeeding that does the harm.

She finished up the term of school, and then she didn't have any place to go—being left alone when the old lady cashed in—and so Johnny married her and brought her to the ranch.

Sa-ay—a woman sure does make a lot of difference on a ranch. Take the best of 'em, and they change things. There ain't the freedom, after a woman hangs up her hat in the house. And I wonder if you've got enough imagination to realize what it was like to have Purty-fer-nice at the Lovelock. And Johnny married to her. And all us fellers hating to quit on account of Johnny, and hating to stay on account of her.

Never changed a hair with matrimony, she didn't. It was Johnny that had to do the changing; and the ranch, and us poor devils on it. You've seen women like that, maybe. Stand-patters—and standing on a pair of deuces most generally. That wouldn't hurt nobody but them, in cards; but in matrimony it's hell.

Take Johnny Lovelock, as straight a young feller as there was in the country; honest, big-hearted, square—what does she do to him? Well, I'll tell yuh. There was smoking—he'd smoked ever since he was a kid in short pants;

if it hurt him it sure didn't show on him, for he was over six feet in his socks and could bulldog a big husky three-year-old steer, and had nerves so steady he was the best rifle shot on the ranch; no wild West hero, you understand, but big and strong and healthy, and liking his smoke with the boys in the bunk house about as well as any of us. Well, Purty-fer-nice, she starts in to work him over according to her little sewin'-society pattern. She didn't approve of tobacco, so Johnny had to quit. Say, it was plumb pitiful to see him watch a man roll a cigarette, and try and not let on he was crazy hungry for a mouthful of smoke.

He took to chewing tobacco, down to the stable; he could rense out his mouth afterward and she wouldn't git wise. It gave him heartburn, but he chewed along for a month or two, and then she found part of a plug in his hind pocket.

I dunno for sure, but I heard she made a helenall row about that. She hadn't been annoyed, mind you, by no tobacco breath, or any smoke, or anything like that. She'd been saved from any disagreeableness whatsoever, and till she found that plug she never suspicioned that Johnny ever got within rifle range of tobacco. But the mere fact that he was gitting some little comfort outa something she didn't like or approve of, started her working the martyr game for all she was worth. Allie, the girl she had doing the work, told us fellers that she bawled around the house worse than a calf in weaning time.

So Johnny, he quit chewing for a while. He was trying his darndest to play the game; I know that. But Purty-fer-nice, she kept accusing him of using tobacco on the sly—so the girl—her name was Allie Brown—told me.

I guess there ain't anything grates on a man like being forever nagged about something he ain't guilty of. Johnny was purty game; he stood that for a couple of weeks or so, and then one day he flew the track. I guess she'd been throwing it into him a little harder than usual, maybe. Anyway, he come down where I was mending harness in the blacksmith shop, and he looked like he could bite a tenpenny nail in two.

"For criminy sake, Frank, gimme a smoke!" he says to me, kinda gritting his teeth over it. I never said a word back—I ain't the kind to lip in between married folks—but I handed out the makings, and he set down on the anvil and smoked three cigarettes without stopping and without saying a word till he was done. "Thanks," he says to me then, and handed back my papers and sack of tobacco, and got up and left.

I was kinda worried about Johnny. Marriage was giving him the worst of the deal, it looked like to me. I went to the door and looked out to see where he was headed for. And while I rolled and smoked a cigarette I seen him saddle up and ride off. Purty-fer-nice, she seen him, too—you know how the trail kinda angles past the house, at the Lovelock—and she came out on the porch in her white dress and white slippers, and hollered after him. You know how some women call folks; kinda chirpy and breaking a name in two in the middle. "Oh, *Joh*-on!" she chirps—but *Joh*-on never looks back. "Oh, *Joh*-on!" she chirps again, and he puts the steel to his horse and hides himself in dust.

Honest, I was kinda sorry for Purty-fer-nice, too. I didn't have any use for her, and she didn't have none for me. We never come within speaking distance if we seen each other in time—but she looked awful little and lonesome there on the porch, watching Johnny ride off mad; I knew he was mad, just as well as if I'd heard him cussing four ways and backward; and I knew he was mad at Purty-fer-nice, just as well as if I'd heard 'em scrapping. And I was

so sorry for Johnny I used to wake up in the night and swear about the way he'd handed himself the worst of it by gitting married. But I was sorry for her—honest, I was.

She stood there till he was outa sight, and then she took her handkerchief and wiped her eyes, and wadded it up and held it aginst her mouth like she wanted to cry and wouldn't. Then she seen me standing in the door of the blacksmith shop. I throwed away my cigarette and ducked back outa sight—that's the way she'd changed things at the Lovelock! Got us so we ducked, by criminy, when we caught her looking at us!—and went back to riveting a holdback strap on the light harness.

In a minute here she was in the door of the shop. And she looked littler and lonesomer than she done before; and her eyes was red and her nose was red and her cheeks was shiny and she'd forgot to repair the damages with powder—which convinced me that she felt bad, more than if she'd spent an hour telling her troubles. When Purty-fer-nice plumb forgot her looks, you could gamble she felt purty blamed tough.

She asked me would I hitch up old Mollie for her. I said I would, and started immediate to go and do it. And just as I was going past her she give a little ketch of her breath and says: "Do you—know where John was going?" Just like that.

I said: "No, I don't know as I do—but I guess maybe he was going to see about the fence in the big field where it's down. He was saying something about it."

That was a lie, a-course. There wasn't no fence down in the big field, and anyway the big field lays off the other way. If I knowed men atall, and Johnny in p'ticular, he was headed for town; he was going with the bit in his teeth—and when a man bolts he don't generally ride off somewheres to set on a hill and admire the view.

I didn't tell her that, a-course. I knowed Johnny was being broke to stay on the ranch unless he had good and sufficient reasons for gitting off it—and then, as a nice, tame husband, he was expected to say *where* he was going, *what* he was going to do when he got there, *when* he would git back, and all about it. And if it was to town, there was more red tape and most generally a list of things wrote down in pen and ink for him to git. So I know she'd do less crying and less nagging maybe when he got back, if she didn't know just where Johnny'd gone.

I ain't going to give a complete history of their private affairs; I don't know as I've got any license to, seeing it was mostly guesswork on my part. But that's a sample of the way things commenced to go with 'em; and when a couple begins that way within two months after the wedding, it stands to reason they're going the downhill trail for fair, unless one or the other has got sense enough to see where they're heading to and pulls up, or they just naturally think so much of each other that when they've both fought to a standstill they turn around and get to pulling together again.

Johnny hadn't never had a boss over him in his life, and he wasn't the kind that took to it. He come to me every day after that, and begged the makings off me. She'd done that much in just about six weeks—she'd make him cheat at the game. One day he got kinda ashamed, or else didn't give a darn—anyway, he went up to the house with a cigarette in his face. Allie, she told me afterward that Purty-fer-nice went four days without speaking to Johnny, and slep' in the spare room while the row lasted. I know Johnny went off to town and stayed a couple of days, and come back with a bottle in his pocket and a lot more than was good for him on the inside of him. And that's some-

thing he wasn't in the habit of doing before he got married.

Well, I butted in then and told Johnny about where to head in at. I didn't have any use for Purty-fer-nice, but at the same time I couldn't see where Johnny had any call to go to the dogs just because a pin-headed female woman like her didn't have no sense.

I told him that and a lot more—only I didn't say nothing about his wife lacking brains. I put it kinda broad and general. I said to him: "Johnny, a married man's got a right to play fair. You never come home half shot when we was a stag party at the Lovelock, and it ain't honest to come like that to your wife," I told him. I said: "You want to cut out all this running on the rope, Johnny. You're snubbed up purty short, but it's up to you to gentle down and not fly back on the lead rope. You went into the corral," I said, "of your own accord. I tried to haze yuh back onto the range and you wouldn't go. Now," I said, "show us you're a man, anyway, that ain't going to cheat when a lady sets into the game. You always played fair," I said, "with men. You're a darned poor specimen," I said, "if you can't play fair with a woman."

Then I handed over the makings, and he looked at me kinda funny, and give a little snort, and rolled a smoke, and give me another funny look.

"You needn't to call me an inconsistent cuss, because I ain't," I said. "Cutting off your tobacco," I explained to him, "is unconstitutional, and don't come under the rules of the game. You gotta have a smoke now and then or you ain't fit for a bull calf to git along with," I told him. "But whisky ain't necessary to your general health and disposition," I said, "and you want to cut it out. And the same with poker."

That last was straight guesswork on my part, but it hit the mark, all right.

Johnny, he scowled at me a minute, and says: "Who told you I was gambling?" And when I just merely looked wise and said nothing—having nothing to say—he says: "I dropped seventy-five dollars—I suppose you heard that, too."

"Well, you want to cut it out," I said, like I'd been wise all the time. "You got a wife now to look after."

That was as much as I dared say—and a whole lot more than anybody else coulda said to Johnny. It helped, maybe. I thought it did, because Johnny, he stayed home for a while, and it seemed like he was trying awful hard to live up to his wife's rules. He'd go two days, sometimes, without coming around for a smoke, and he wouldn't come near the bunk house, which was another thing Purty-fer-nice set down on. She hated like sin to have him come and set talking to the boys, or play a game uh solo or anything, and she'd always act abused, Allie told me, when he'd spend half an hour or so down with us.

He'd stick to Purty-fer-nice and go without smoking and toe the mark and shave every morning and set and listen to her read poetry to him—Allie said she seemed to think she'd got to educate Johnny up to her level—and take her buggy riding around to places where he didn't want to go; and she'd think, I guess, she'd got him tamed proper. And then he'd break out and spend a whole evening with us fellers in the bunk house, and let on like he never heard when she'd come out on the porch and call, "Oh, *Joh*-on" along about eight o'clock. Us fellers called it ringing the curfew. And he'd smoke till he got dizzy-headed, and go to town and gamble, and have the hull darned ranch worrying about his morals.

Some of the boys got plumb disgusted with seeing Johnny spoiled that way, and quit. But I stayed with him. It looked to me like Johnny needed friends more than he'd ever needed 'em, and that the supply was dwindling.

Purty-fer-nice didn't have much company; I don't believe there was more than four or five women at the ranch all summer, and most of them come to see Allie. A-course, I was gone the biggest part of the time, but Allie, she told me. She said Purty-fer-nice told her that no lady would use slang the why them rancher women done, and she said their grammar was awful and their manners was crude. And she said they never read nothing but the county paper and trashy magazines, and so they couldn't talk about nothing except their narrow little lives and each other. She said she was plumb tired of hearing about the internal ailments of them women. Naturally they didn't wear the trail out to the Lovelock visiting her when she felt that way about 'em. . . . But all that was hard on Johnny.

Johnny was the kinda feller that could ride to a ranch at any hour of the day or night, and be fed pie and joshed and have his hat hid so he'd have to stay for a meal or two or all night, maybe. You've seen them kind. All the kids running up the trail to meet him, and the women actin' like the angels had give 'em charge over him, and they was anxious to do the job proper. It was plumb pitiful, to me, to see how the Lovelock trail was left cold, and how Johnny, he never went around places no more just to be friendly. Purty-fer-nice wouldn't visit, because the women quit coming to see her; and if she wouldn't go, Johnny wouldn't. See how it worked out?

And yet at the same time I couldn't help feeling kinda sorry for her, too. She meant all right, I guess. She simply didn't have sense enough to see she couldn't bring out a bunch of Eastern rules and make the West follow 'em. She wouldn't 'a' thanked Johnny to move back East and try to work her and all her friends over to suit what he'd been used to; you see, don't you? It was plumb foolish. We're different out here, just because we have to be. The country and the life we've lived has made us different. And no little, slim, hard-as-nails schoolmarm could work us over. All she coulda done was to fit herself into the life somehow—or else git out. She liked Johnny, I guess—but she plumb ruined him, just the same; and she done it in ignorance and with being too narrow and too strict and too darned sure she was right always, and in not being human enough.

It was gitting close onto spring when the big blizzard hit the sage country. Johnny'd gone to town horseback the day before, and he'd went because he was mad. I don't know just what the row was about that time—Allie, she didn't know, for she was out in the kitchen, washing, and both doors was shut when the big set-to took place. But I guess it was the same old story, most likely; Johnny had probably did something contrary to the book of etiquette, or had maybe said something crude. Anyway, he went off mad, and he didn't come back that night, nor the next night; nor never.

It was the next day that the storm hit us all in a heap. Forenoon had been warm and sunny—but kinda weather-breedy and hazy and too still. Then she come with a whoop, along about 'leven o'clock. Say, she was sure a real one! Snow like flour, and so thick in the air you couldn't breathe scarcely, nor see, either. I was down to the creek chopping out a water hole when she struck, and I know I had a whale of a time gitting up to the bunk house. That's how bad it was, five minutes after it commenced. There didn't happen to be nobody but me and a feller we called Missou' on the ranch that day—and Allie and Purty-fer-nice, a-course. In the winter us fellers et up at the house to save the price of a cook—we et in the kitchen. And we

went when we was called and beat it before we'd got our last mouthful swallered; it wasn't comf'table at the house with Purty-fer-nice liable to walk into the kitchen any minute and give us that school-teachery look of hers that made us wonder if our ears was clean or she'd saw us put our knives into our mouths.

Allie, she hollered, right after I'd got to the bunk house, and I went over. I thought it was kinda early for dinner, but I thought maybe she was outa wood or something. It was Purty-fer-nice—she was sick, and Allie was plumb scared to death, there alone with her. She said Purty-fer-nice was worried about Johnny. She said she'd been kinda sick all forenoon, but she was gitting worse right along, and Allie thought somebody oughta go fer the doctor, or something. And why in time wasn't Johnny Lovelock home where he belonged? And when did I s'pose he'd show up? And couldn't I *do* something? You know how some women are; they don't think much of a man till things go wrong, and then they expect him to go to work and hog-tie fate and all the furies and put a ring in their noses so they'll lead.

Well, I took Allie by the arm and led her over to the window, and showed her the storm, and asked her what chance she reckoned a feller'd have, going fer a doctor. Or what chance Johnny had of gitting home. Or what in blazes she expected me to *do*, anyway. "You see," I said, "you can't see nothing but snow. You can't see the bunk house half the time. Stand outside by the corner of the woodshed, and I'll bet a month's wages you can't hold your eyes open, or breathe facing that wind. And," I said to 'er, "what the blinkin' blue blazes do you think any human man can do aginst a storm like that? If I could git to town," I told 'er, "I'd go a hell popping. But I know what I'd be up aginst if I tackled such a fool thing as riding ten miles aginst that combination."

And then Purty-fer-nice, she called out in the kitchen: "Oh, *Joh*-on! Is that you, John?"

Sa-ay, did you ever notice how just the tonation of a voice can make the cold chills run all over yuh? I dunno why it was, but I got that way all of a suddent. I just stood there and didn't dast breathe, and I felt cold crimples going down to my toes and up to my hair. I dunno why. I hadn't commenced to worry about Johnny; I just simply told myself he was in town, and let it go at that. And Purty-fer-nice's voice didn't sound any different from what it always sounded, unless, maybe, it was kinda anxious and kinda wishful-like.

"Oh, *Joh*-on!" she chirps again, the way women like her call a name. And in a minute she says: "Allie, is my husband with you?"

"No, ma'am," says Allie, like a scholar in school, "it isn't nobody but just Frank."

"Isn't—anybody," Purty-fer-nice corrected her, like she was hearing the last class and was tired and wishing it was time to let out school.

"Yes, ma'am, it isn't *anybody* but Frank," said Allie, like she was thankful it wasn't no worse.

I started outa the house on my tiptoes and with my gills working for more air. But Allie, she yanked me by the arm, and says: "You come back here, you yeller streak! Yuh think I'm going to stay alone with her?" And so I stayed. Nobody'd ever accused me of being yeller before.

Well—folks sometimes have to go through things they don't never feel like talking about afterward. That day and night and the next day was the beginning of one of the times. Every time the door would open or shut, or anybody would forgit and squeak out loud in the kitchen, you'd hear Purty-

fer-nice holler: "Oh, *Joh*-on!"—and say, it got so I'd jump like a bronk at a rattler every time I heard her. And there was other things that got on a feller's nerves. She was purty sick, all right. And she wanted Johnny—and she ought to a-had Johnny right there with her—and Johnny . . . Johnny, he never come till we brung him in feet first, froze stiff as a log.

You've heard time enough about him starting home and gitting caught in the blizzard on that bare ridge they call the Devil's Backbone. It sure is bleak, up along that ridge. . . .

Well, the baby didn't live more'n an hour or so, Allie said. Poor little devil, maybe it met up with its dad somewheres out on the long trail. I figured it that they both went about the same time, and maybe Johnny he located that pore little mite of a ghost and kinda cuddled it along. . . . You can't tell.

It was sure hard on Purty-fer-nice. I know there was one spell when she kep' a-calling "Oh, *Joh*-on!" till, honest, I used to set with both hands over my ears, even when I was in the bunk house and only imagined I heard her. That was hell all around.

She was so sick nobody dast tell her about Johnny till a week, maybe, after we buried him. And she kept a-calling him when she'd hear anybody come into the house. . . . Say, I dream about that yet, when I've et pie for supper or anything like that. I don't hardly ever touch pie no more, just on that account; I'm liable to hear Purty-fer-nice holler "Oh, *Joh*-on!" and dream that Johnny's laying froze solid in the bunk house, where we brought him. . . . Yuh know I found him partly buried in snow alongside the trail, when the storm had let up and I was coming back from gitting the doctor. I found out in town he'd started home an hour or so ahead of the blizzard, and so I was looking fer him all the way back.

I guess it was a month or six weeks after that, when us fellers first found out that the old Lovelock was purty much to the bad all around. A red-faced, mouthy son of a gun from town drove out one warm day; and Allie told me he had Purty-fer-nice going south inside half an hour. Yuh see, Johnny had made his will right after he got married, and left everything to Purty-fer-nice to do-with as she seen fit. She'd had a lawyer out to the ranch and fixed up the red tape, soon as she was able to set up; Purty-fer-nice was great on being businesslike—I suppose that was the schoolmarm sticking out.

Well, anyway, we was taking it fer granted the outfit would go along purty much the same—only it wouldn't ever seem the same with Johnny gone—and all us fellers was wondering would we git canned or not, and saying we didn't give a cuss if we did, and that we was liable to roll our beds and hit the trail, anyway, if Purty-fer-nice tried to run things herself. We'd seen how she'd run Johnny—run him into his coffin at that; we all blamed her, kinda, fer what had happened—and we didn't want none of that in ours.

So then here comes this fish-eyed mark from town, with a mortgage in his inside pocket that Johnny had give him on a gambling debt, and a note or two, and asked Purty-fer-nice what she was going to do about it? Allie told me about it; she heard 'em talking and put me wise. This tinhorn offered to buy the ranch and cattle; he said he had outside capital to invest, and he'd take out what Johnny owed him—and that, according to him, was somewheres around ten thousand. Purty-fer-nice jumped at the chance, Allie said. She was sick of Idaho, anyway, and wanted to git back to what she called civilization. Also she didn't have no use fer the ranch on general principles, and she was sore because Johnny had gambled away all that money—which I've got my

doubts about, and always have had. I think there was some crooked work about them notes and that mortgage, and I thought so then. Johnny might drop a hundred or so, but he wasn't no high roller like them notes looked like.

Well, Purty-fer-nice she sent for me, and wanted to know how many cattle there was. They was dickering on the price then, and she'd agreed to sell out everything. I told her the tally books would show that, and went on to say that when a cow outfit sold out they most generally sold the books. You know—sold what the tally books showed.

Dickinson—that was the gazabo's name—he balked at that. He said he wasn't in the habit of buying sight-unseen like that. He'd pay fer what cattle was actually running the range, and not for what any book said *ought* to be. It had been a hard winter, he said, and the chances was a lot of stock had died off; in fact, he said he had heard on good authority that the range stock had suffered all through the country. And he said he wouldn't buy no books. The cattle, he said, would have to be rounded up and counted, and he'd pay fer what there actually was.

A-course, there wasn't nothing fer me to say. I knowed he was a sharper and wanted the big end of the deal; and I knowed Purty-fer-nice wasn't able to hold her own with him; and I didn't have nothing but my own opinions, and what I knew of Johnny, to prove he lied and never had no honest debt aginst the Lovelock fer any ten thousand. All I could do was keep my face shut.

Later on I heard what he was going to pay a head fer the stock, and it made me so sick I did go to Purty-fer-nice, and told her she was being hornswoggled all around. And she give me to understand that I was to mind my own business, and not butt in. She said she was satisfied with the price, and had agreed to it, and had signed some kinda darned paper that clinched the deal. All I was to do, she told me, was to gether up the stock and see that they was counted.

I will say she didn't come down on me with both feet, like she done the first time I saw her, but she was purty cool—and if she hadn't been so little and peaked and white and kinda helpless looking, and if I hadn't heard her calling and calling fer Johnny when Johnny was laying dead in the bunk house, I'd 'a' told her to go to thunder, and gether up her own cattle.

She stood to lose ten dollars a head on the stock, and that counts up fast. She'd oughta asked me or some one that knowed, before she went and agreed on any price. And she'd oughta made 'em buy the books. And she'd oughta took some steps to find out fer sure whether Johnny owed that there Dickinson any ten thousand dollars. But no—you can't beat a woman fer bull-headedness, especially when she's tackling something she don't know anything about. She wouldn't hear to nothing. I was to take out the wagons and gether the stock and bring 'em all in to the ranch; and I was to see that Mr. Dickinson had a chance to count the herd. And I was to keep my nose out of everything but my own affairs; she didn't *say* that, but she looked it and acted it.

I tried to tell her that she better hold off till after the calf crop—but she got red and shut me off; she was one of them kind that mustn't hear nothing about one of the biggest things in life, because it's *coarse!* Couldn't tell her that, seeing Dickinson was buying the herd at so much a head big and little, every calf helped out that much.

"I prefer not to discuss such subjects," she says, and I had to quit right there. She said Mr. Dickinson was in a hurry—which I believed, all right; the quicker he could rush things through the safer he was in doing it. And she

said she was in a hurry, too. She would give immediate possession, she said, just as soon as the stock was counted and turned over. And I was to git right out and round up them cattle as quick as the Lord'd let me.

The storm that took Johnny and Johnny's baby had also put a crimp in the stock, all right enough. And they'd drifted. I got a full crew, and we combed the range from the Rockies to Salmon River and south to the Snake. We wore out the saddle bunch till there wasn't a day passed that some of the boys didn't come in off circle afoot and swearing to beat a full house. And while I'd dodged naming any figures when I was called on to hand out information to Dickinson and Purty-fer-nice, I knew within a hundred head how much stock we oughta have. I'd handled the Lovelock iron too long not to know; why, I coulda told 'em offhand how many calves had been branded for the last five or six years, and how many carloads had been shipped, and all about it. The last year, a-course, had kinda got past me, on account of Johnny running on the rope somewhat, and the hard winter gitting in its work. But making allowance fer poor cows and old stuff and yearlings we'd missed at weaning time dying off during that big storm and before that, there'd oughta been somewheres between four and five thousand head, counting the calf crop.

Well, the calf crop was short, a-course. And cattle must have drifted plumb outa the country. But the sickenest part was the Lovelock critters laying in the little draws and brushy bottoms, or up on the bleak places where the big storm had caught 'em. All told, we drove just exactly nineteen hundred and seven head in to the big field over there east of the ranch. I had reps out with different outfits, a-course, but the word I got from 'em just before I hit the ranch wasn't much encouragement.

So there was the stock trimmed down more'n half, and there was Purty-fer-nice gitting bilked about ten dollars a head on what there was, and there was Dickinson with that ten-thousand-dollar claim aginst the estate which nobody asked him to prove or nothing, and which I didn't believe in atall. Honest, it was the rawest deal I'd ever went up aginst, and I guess I wouldn't 'a' felt much sorer about it if it was me gitting trimmed in a crooked game, instead of Purty-fer-nice. I didn't have no use for her, mind; I blamed her for a lot of the trouble, and for Johnny passing out. But I do love a square deal—and I don't care who's setting in the game.

Well, I throwed the stock into the big field and rode up to the house and told Purty-fer-nice she could send word to Dickinson that the stock was ready to be counted. And then I went to the bunk house and flopped myself on a bed, and done some of the hardest thinking I ever done in my life. Letting Dickinson git away with it sure got my goat, as the saying is now.

A-course, it wasn't my funeral—and yet it was, too, kinda. Johnny had always counted on me to look out for things when he was gone, and take care of what belonged to him same as if it was mine. And I knowed how quick he'd 'a' made a roar about the way things was going, if he'd been where he could do anything. And Johnny wasn't there, and so I kinda felt it was up to me to see that Purty-fer-nice had a fair deal. And it was the helenall of a job to look after her interests when she'd gone and balled things up with her darned agreements and her general bull-headedness. I couldn't even tell her she was gitting stung, and shoulda held out for selling the books and letting the Dickinson bunch do the gathering and counting. That's what I'd 'a' done. She coulda made a discount fer possible loss on the range, and still been

away ahead of what she was with 'em all gethered up and counted.

Well—I dunno as I oughta tell the straight of this. I dunno how it will look to yuh. But it sure looked good to me at the time, and it always has looked good. And I ain't never been troubled in my conscience fer what I done. So here's my hand, spread on the table:

I went and hunted up one or two of the boys, and talked the thing over with 'em, and then we got a couple more and chinned a while, and then we was ready fer what might befall—as the church hymn says.

Dickinson, he come out in a top buggy, and he had the cashier of a bank in the rig with him, and another feller he called an expert accountant. He come down to where I was, and said I could pick a man from the ranch—or two men if I liked, to count fer Purty-fer-nice. He said he wanted everything to be all straight and satisfactory, and that he would not fer the world cheat a woman. I just listened and said unh-hunh, like I swallowed it all as if it was oyster soup at a sociable, and went off and got my outfit together, and we all went down in the big field.

Sa-ay, have yuh ever been down east of the Lovelock, in that big field? It's just about two sections, you know, under bobwire fence. And yuh known that string of little buttes along about in the middle, don't yuh? Four of 'em, kinda like a string of sausages—you know 'em. You can see 'em fine from the top of the Devil's Backbone. Well, if you've ever been down close, you know how the one on the south end lays due north and south. It's little, and there's a narrow gully—oh, maybe two rod across in the widest place, and narrowing down on the east side to about twelve or fifteen feet—between that and the second butte; and then the other two swings back east, so they lay kinda cattacornering to the others.

Well, I put Dickinson and his two counters on gentle horses and led 'em down there, and showed 'em the gulch and the herd grazing off to one side, all scattered out in rough country. I told 'em to git off and stand on one side of the gulch, and I'd put two men on the other side, and we'd drive the bunch through, single file.

Dickinson, he casts his eye out over what he could see of the herd, and then he turns to me, and says: "Oh—ah—about how many head do you think there is?"

I squinted out over the field and went through the motions of considering the matter, and then I said: "Well, I never made no count. It's hard to say. They *oughta* be somewheres in the neighborhood of five thousand," I said. "The tally books showed that much last summer, and while there was some loss, a-course, there's the calf crop this spring," I told him.

He kinda grunted. "I ain't buying them by the book," he says purty short. "I'm buying what goes through this pass. Go start 'em up."

I rode off, kinda grinning to myself, and got the boys started. The stock wasn't so scattered out as they looked from the buttes.

Y'see, I'd had 'em placed, like you place the furniture on a stage, to show up good from the front. And while the west side of the slopes was sprinkled thick with cattle, believe me, there wasn't none hid outa sight in the hollers! So I had the boys posted, and they worked 'em along toward the south end of the field to git around a deep gully—and for other reasons—and trailed 'em up to the pass, strung out thin so'st they wouldn't bunch up and begin to mill; and an old bell cow from the ranch in the lead. Nineteen hundred head a cattle looks big to a greenhorn.

I rode up with a coupla the boys, and asked Dickinson if he'd ever counted cattle. He just the same as asked me

what it was *to* me, so I never said any more. The boys got their pocket of pebbles for counters, and I went back and got the old bell cow headed for the gulch and the rest follering along all right, and waited till they was stringing through the pass in good shape. And then I rode around with some of the boys to the other end of the gully to receive 'em as they come through, and send 'em on.

We-ell, we received 'em, all right; and things was going like clockwork. If they hadn't of went that way, I wouldn't be telling yuh about it. But I come purty near falling down on the job just because it *did* go so danged smooth. I hung around with the receiving crew till something kinda prodded me up that I better see how they was making out on the other side, so I loped around to where they was feeding cattle to them three town fellers steady as wheat into a mill. One of my boys I had counting for the outfit—Smiley, we called him—seen me ride up and flagged me. So I rode up to where he was counting opposite Dickinson and dropping a pebble in one of his pockets for every hundred—you know how they count stock.

We-ell, he didn't say nothing, but went on counting. But he give me a funny look, and then tilted his head toward the thin little trickle uh cattle that flowed between us and Dickinson's bunch. The dust was purty thick by that time, and Dickinson was too busy counting to look our way, so I got off my horse and went up close to Smiley, like as if I was watching the cattle.

Smiley, he counted fer a minute longer, and then he says to me kinda worried and under his breath; but never taking his eyes off the cattle: "Rustle me another hatful uh rocks, Frank—and for criminy sake, don't send that old speckled cow with the twisted horn past us agin! She's gitting purty derned conspicuous. I've counted her four times a-ready, and I seen one uh them gazabos acrost there take a second look at her last time she went along."

I stood a minute longer, and went back and fell onto m'horse and rode down till I was outa sight, and then went hell poppin' around that little end butte, and stopped the percession. Sure enough, right turnin' the corner, as yuh might say, was the speckled cow with the twisted horn. I cut the bunch in two right there, and hazed her back north. I hated like sin to spoil that lovely ring-around-a-rosy, but it was better to be safe than sorry. I've always believed, though, I coulda made them town sharps count up another five thousand on theirselves, easy, before they'd commence to wonder how about it!

Oh, sure, they was satisfied, but kinda sour. They'd counted up a little over six thousand—and I couldn't help but think of that old yarn about the fish and the loaves uh bread, and about the widder's oil supply; I forgit what they called it. Dickinson he come to me, and he says, kinda grouchy: "That's more'n the record Lovelock had, isn't it? You said between four and five thousand. We've counted six thousand and thirteen—and your men have made it six thousand and nineteen."

"We-ell," I says to him, "we'll let your count go. I guess that'll be all right. And," I says, sober as you please, "you shoulda took my advice and bought the books. I know," I said, "about how these things come out. There's most generally less stock on the books than there is on the range; us cattlemen," I told him, "is inclined to be kinda careless after we git more stock on our hands than we can call by name."

"You certainly must be," he snaps out. "I'm paying for at least a thousand head more than the books have any record of."

"Well," I says, real cheerful,

"a-course you'd hate like sin to git the best of a lady to the extent of a thousand head uh cattle. And if yuh want to you can keep still about what stock the reps bring in later. That'll be none uh my business," I said. "I never did like Johnny's wife, nohow. I'll gamble," I told him, "she won't never know the difference; and," I says, "as long as she gits paid fer more'n what the books show, she's got no kick coming."

Well, that old skunk, he went down into his pocket and fished up a twenty-dollar gold piece, and give me! Sure, I took it. I got it now; and when I kinda git to thinking about old times, I try to figure out sometimes whether that there gold piece can rightly be looked on as a medal, earned by pertecting widders and orphans, or just a plain old piece of graft I oughta be ashamed of, but ain't.

Oh, sure, we throwed that herd right onto the range, and scattered 'em as quick as we'd branded the calves, and another hard winter or two come along; so Dickinson, he never did git wise. And Purty-fer-nice, she's back East—went quick as she got her money outa Dickinson's bunch—and I guess she's still telling it scary about us low brutes of cow-punchers out West, that ain't got no manners atall, and eats with our knives.

The $1.50 novel which you will find printed complete in the next issue is by the author of "Purty-fer-Nice"—B. M. Bower whose great stories of the West are in a class by themselves. Bower's new novel is entitled "The Spook Hills Mystery."

NOTHING TO STOP HIM

REPRESENTATIVE TOM HEFLIN, of Alabama, than whom there is no greater authority on anecdotes, tells this one in his speeches to illustrate the Southern darky's gift for hero worship.

Two old negroes, who had spent their lives in faithful service of President Andrew Jackson, commonly known as "Old Hickory," were discussing the great man the day after his death.

"George," said Sam, "wuz you wid him clean up till he died?"

"Yes, nigger," replied George. "I wuz settin' right thar aside him. I wuz right whar I could reach out and tech him. I seen ev'ything he done and I heerd ev'ything he said."

"George," pursued Sam, "did he 'fess religion?"

"No," said George. "He ain' 'fessed no religion whasomever. Dar warn't no preachers dar, an' I didn't hear him say nothin' 'bout religion. He jes' died. Dat's all he done."

"Well," mused Sam, after a pause, "I don' reckon he done went to heaven."

At this George became indignant, asking loudly:

"Whut's de mattah wid you, nigger? Why ain't he goin' to heaven?"

"How he gwine to heaven if he don' 'fess no religion?" continued Sam argumentatively.

"Look hyuh, nigger," said George, dismissing the subject, "ef Ole Hick'ry want to go to heaven, who gwine stop him?"

The Hill Billy and the Cowpea Picker

By William H. Hamby

Author of "The Hill Billy Starts a Store," "The Hill Billy Tries for Office," Etc.

It is always interesting to guess what the hill billy is going to do next. His first adventure netted him thirty-six dollars, and he made it by picking cowpeas by hand and threshing them out with a pole and selling the seed. His newest attempt to scale the heights of financial prosperity has to do with cowpea picking, but on a vastly bigger scale than anything he had attempted in earlier days. You have read of some of his exploits in Wahoo City. There's a group of men there who declared he was lucky, just lucky; but they were to learn by bitter experience that there was something more attached to this young man from the hills than a streak of luck.

(*A Novelette*)

THE cracker-barrel and nail-keg population of Wahoo City was pretty busy during the first week in April speculating on what the hill billy would "try to do" when he got back from the legislature.

They had never got it out of their heads that what he had already done was not merely luck. It could not be accounted for any other way. Why, it had only been three years since Lafe Jason had come right up out of the hills—on foot, barely old enough to vote, wearing an old coat that bagged as though he had hunted squirrels with rocks in his pockets. He had a tall, peaked head with dry-grass-colored hair, a wisp of which never would lie down; his eyes were pale blue, and he did not talk much.

That day he walked into Wahoo City he had only thirty-six dollars in his pockets. He had made that by picking cowpeas by hand, and threshing them out with a pole, and selling the seed. It was the most money he ever had in his life. And now in three years —the length of time it took the sit-patters to decide whether to sow turnips in the back lot or let it grow up in wild blackberries—he had made "nigh on to" fifteen thousand dollars, and been elected to the legislature.

Of course it was luck, for hadn't they been raised in the same hills and lived right there in the same town, and nothing like that ever happened to them. Still, it was interesting to guess what the hill billy would try next. It is always interesting to wonder what a fellow will do with fourteen thousand dollars.

But there was a small bunch of men in Wahoo City who had learned by bitter experience that there was something more attached to this young man from the hills than a streak of luck. This bunch was the old, greedy, moss-

back business ring, the sixty-nine per cent gang, who for twenty years had run out every new man—but one, and continued to sell shoddy, out-of-date goods at enormous profits.

There was Samuel T. Birkins of the Big Brick Store, who wore a black mustache and a smirk; who called the preacher "brother," and told nasty stories in the back of the drug stores, who palavered his customers and bullied his clerks, and considered himself most devilish clever and subtle. And Horatio Ames, who wore glasses and always had a flower in his buttonhole, gave good advice, and counted that day lost whose low descending sun viewed not from his store some worthy customer done. Ben Hilman was the third, his store a hodgepodge of antiquated merchandise, but his price lists a thing of shame to even an exclusive monopoly. Hilman had a thick neck, a red face, a voice like stage thunder, and a general atmosphere of amber and brimstone. The tenor of this business quartet was the round, pink-faced, plausible, well-wishing, nonaccommodating bank cashier, Alfred Walters.

This gang had greeted, three years ago, the newly arrived hill billy who applied for work, with grins and condescending advice to go back to the farm and get him a one-eyed mule and try to raise sorghum and oats. Then they got mad when he lingered around, figured out their cost marks, and sold the list to a hundred farmers at two dollars a head. They laughed when he started a store on two hundred dollars; they fumed when he got trade; and grew furious when they started to run him out and he did not run. From then on no scheme to drive him out was too diabolical for them to try, and after each try they hated him worse. Finally when nobody had expected it, he turned his attention to politics, and, without any backing to speak of, elected himself representative—and that without buying a vote. Now that the legislature had adjourned and Lafe Jason was returning, it was a burning question with this gang what the hill billy would try to "put over" next. They had thoroughly got rid of the idea of luck. There was a primal urge for getting on in this young man with pale-blue eyes and a mild drawl that they did not understand. But they did understand results. And past results did not suggest future comfort to the gang. What *would* he do next? But there was one deep-rooted conviction in all of them, a conviction born of hate and loss—whatever he did try, this time they would smash him for good and all.

The day Lafe Jason returned from the legislature Nina Wingate wore her new spring suit. It was a beauty. She had spent a whole day at Kansas City selecting it—or rather hunting it, for she always knew the clothes that belonged to her the moment she found them.

She was restless during the morning, and went over her report twice. She had managed the store while he was away in the legislature, and had an excellent report for him. Business had been fine. But somehow she could not keep her mind on the columns of figures.

Lafe came in on the noon train, and went directly to the hotel. At one o'clock Nina, glancing from the side window of the store, saw him sauntering down the street. She swallowed and bit her under lip. He did not appear at all glad to be back.

"Hello, Nina!" Lafe quickened his steps as he came into the store, and reached his hand across the counter to her. He wore a new tailor-made suit —the first he ever had, and there was no longer a trace of the hill billy about him. He looked quite the man of affairs he had so rapidly become. He appeared so fine he almost seemed a

stranger, but his hat off, as he bent over the desk to examine the report, a wisp of straw-colored hair at the top of his tall head rose up just as it had through the twenty-five years of his uncombed boyhood. Nina smiled, and there was something glad and touching almost to tears in her smile. He was a hill billy still. She wondered if the wisp of hair would lie down if she smoothed it back with her hands.

"Good work, little partner! Fine re-jiort!" Lafe Jason looked up from the totals. Nina was arranging a display of women's neckwear, and only the side of her face was to him. "The longer I stay away the better the store does." He laughed. "You are a positive genius. If I should take a trip to South America or Honolulu, you'd be rich before I got back."

"Thank you!" She smiled. But already she saw his mind had left the report. He got up, and sat on the edge of the counter.

"Nina," he said, turning to her, "you been reading about how many hundreds of millions of flies one fly will make if you don't swat it early in the spring?"

"Yes," said Nina, "and we have been swatting them."

"I wasn't thinking of flies," he said, with a whimsically serious smile. "Only I was thinking they are like wants. If you have one want, and feed it, instead of swatting it, it'll make a million other wants."

He looked out of the door, and tapped his swinging heels against the counter.

"Remember the time you came to Wahoo City?" Lafe asked without looking around.

"Yes." Indeed, Nina remembered! How that five-dollar-a-week job in Birkins' store looked like the very golden rungs on the ladder of success!

"It doesn't look the same to you now, does it?" Lafe turned to her rather a puzzled face.

"No," she confessed. She was now getting twenty-five dollars a week as manager of Jason's store—and ought to have been happy.

Lafe looked out again—and then with a sort of grunt of disgust:

"It is the very runt of a town. It looks like a shote that has been singed in the ashes of a burned brush pile and then wallowed in the mud. I'm going to get out of it." He jumped down from the counter. "I've got to make fifty thousand dollars!"

"How, Lafe?" Nina asked eagerly. She wanted to get out of the miserable little town, too.

"I don't know." The hill billy shook his head. "I can't make it here. I've got Birkins and the gang so scared I could not swap them diamonds for hazelnuts without roping them to a post and stuffing them in their pockets." He grinned.

"No"—again he shook his head—"I don't know where or how or when—but I'll make that fifty thousand! You hang on to the store until I find a way."

He took his hat, and struck off down the west road toward the hills. He always went to the hills when he wanted to think.

II.

It was after supper, and a half dozen men and four women were on the porch and lawn, for it was a warm evening for the first of May. The Bright Mansion was a second-class boarding house that took in transients at a dollar a day, and regulars at six a week.

On the lawn, a little apart from the rest, sitting almost in the shadow, was a young man dressed in a new spring suit, with his hat on the bench beside him. A streak of light from the boarding-house window just touched the top of his tall, peaked head, and showed a

wisp of dry-grass-colored hair standing out at an angle of thirty-seven degrees. The hill billy had been in Springfield two weeks.

A man sauntered out from the front door, and paused a moment on the porch, where the end of his cigar showed in the dusk. Then he came straight for the hill billy, sat down beside him, and leaned back contentedly, and complimented the weather.

"Since talking to you last night," the man with the cigar said, dropping his voice, but intensifying it, "I've gone over my books very carefully, and find I can offer you even a better proposition than I thought."

There was a slight rustle on the porch, where the landlady sat telling a young woman boarder about the scandalous price of butter. The young woman had turned her chair, and leaned her elbow on the porch banister so as to get as little of the butter talk and as much of the lawn conversation as possible.

"It is like this"—the man beside the hill billy took the cigar out of his mouth, and, between thumb and forefinger, gestured with it—"I've a great business—making money hand over fist, but I need a bright young man and a little more capital."

Lafe made no comment. He had been amazed to find in two weeks how many concerns there are making money hand over fist that a fellow can get into with ten thousand dollars. It was a mere matter of choice whether he should get into a "safe, conservative" business that nets thirty-eight per cent, or one sure to double his money within a year.

"But I don't know anything about manufacturing barbed wire," the hill billy remarked as the fellow pushed him to take a third interest for ten thousand dollars.

"That doesn't make any difference—you can soon learn."

"I may not like it," Lafe again suggested.

"Suppose you don't—what does that hurt? You are bound to like it when the dough begins to roll in."

"But what would I do?"

"Oh, there is plenty you could do," declared the barbed-wire man. "You could keep books—or tend the office—anything that struck you."

There was a moment's pregnant silence in which the hill billy seemed to be deeply considering it.

"What is it?" The barbed-wire man dropped a confident hand on his knee. "Yes—isn't it?"

"No!" The girl leaning on the porch banister missed the word as it was just then engulfed in the landlady's "My land!" but she saw that wisp of unruly hair shake negatively, and then heard in a lull, the slow, decisive:

"I've got it figured out like this—a concern that wants my money worse than it does me is pretty likely to keep the money longer than it does me."

The barbed-wire man took his cigar and a bad case of grouch off to town, as several philanthropic gentlemen, who wanted to make large donations to the hill billy's fortunes, had done in the past few days.

The other boarders scattered, some to the trains, some to the picture shows, a few to work. The landlady with her grudge at the high cost of living and the low cost of board went in. Lafe still sat on the lawn, looking speculatively at the warm May sky, with its merry stars. The girl alone still sat on the porch, leaning with her elbows on the banister.

Directly she got up, came to the porch steps, and paused, irresolute. Lafe was conscious of her movements. He had been conscious of her at the dinner table. She seemed very different from any other boarder who had come to the Bright Mansion since his

stay there. She didn't really seem like a boarder at all.

She made an attractive figure standing there on the top step in the half light.

After a moment's hesitation she came down the steps and crossed the lawn, and sat down beside him.

"It is too pleasant an evening to go in." Her voice was as attractive as the black hair loose over her ears, and her eyes.

"Yes, it is," agreed Lafe. It was a pleasant sensation to have a girl voluntarily come and sit down beside him for conversation. It pleases any man for an attractive woman to consider him of enough interest to approach him, regardless of her motives.

"Have you been here long?" She looked at him a little intently.

"No—only two weeks."

"Are you acquainted here?"

"Only slightly," he answered. "Are you?"

"No," she said, "I've only come today; and I've never been in Springfield but a few times."

There was a moment in which both waited for the other to make a lead.

"Do you live in this part of the country?" she asked, to make further conversation.

"Not far away," he said. "I'm a regular hill billy."

She laughed. "Then I'm a hill nanny—I was raised in the Ozarks mostly. But we've lived at a little town called Peach Knob for the last five years."

Lafe looked at her frankly. He did not express any surprise; but it occurred to him she looked less like a native hill girl than any one he had ever seen. He had seen plenty of pretty girls in the Ozarks—but none of them looked like this one.

"I heard you talking a while ago to a man about an investment."

"You mean"—a slow smile covered his face—"you heard him talking to me."

She laughed. It was a merry laugh, even if it did sound as though she was not thinking about it.

"Yes, that was it. You didn't decide to go in with him?"

"No."

"How much have you to invest?"

"Oh—not very much," evasively.

"Several thousand?" She was looking at him intently again.

"Perhaps."

She looked away at the stars, and drew a deep, lonesome sort of breath.

"I'm afraid you'll think me rather bold to approach you like this."

"Not at all," he said hastily and sincerely. Really he had not thought of it being the least bit out of the way.

"Thank you." The tone expressed both gratitude and sincerity. "I really had a motive—a selfish motive in getting acquainted with you. My name is Nannie Hassler."

"Mine is Lafe Jason," he added.

"I have a proposition"—she spoke a little hastily and nervously—"that I believe will be very profitable for us both. Would you let me explain it to you some time soon?"

"I would be delighted to," Lafe assented readily.

"Say to-morrow morning at ten? I couldn't be ready sooner than that."

"That will suit me," he nodded.

"I will arrange with Mrs. Olander for us to have the upstairs parlor." She arose. "Now, Mr. Hill Billy," she shook her forefinger at him and laughed, "don't you forget—and don't you come armed to the teeth with 'I won'ts.'" She turned and went in, calling back from the porch:

"Good night, Mr. Jason."

III.

Jason went to the boarding-house parlor exactly at ten. Miss Hassler was awaiting him. She met him at the

door and shook hands in a friendly, but not too friendly, way. He noticed her hands were white but strong, and her eyebrows were highly arched. Her morning gown did not remotely suggest an Ozark farm girl. She looked even more attractive in the fresh morning light than she had on the bench in the starlight the evening before.

"I am not a business woman, Mr. Jason," she began when they were seated. She leaned slightly forward, her bare elbows on the arms of her chair, and smiled apologetically. "And yet I am on a business mission. It is as an investor that I want to talk to you." She lifted her eyebrows questioningly for his assent. The tone implied that now that he knew her object he could decline the interview if he desired.

Lafe nodded, and that quizzical but friendly smile covered his face.

"Go ahead," he urged. "I am looking for an investment."

"I guess I better begin at the beginning," she said, thinking for a way to put it. "You know"—she looked at him with amusement in her eyes—"a woman can't tell one thing without telling it all. As I told you last night, I was raised on an Ozark farm, but later we moved to Peach Knob, and then to Sheffield, near Kansas City—and we are very poor."

"You don't look it." Lafe spoke his thoughts without intention of either compliment or suspicion.

"Which?" she questioned, "very poor, or raised in the hills?"

"Neither," he assured her sincerely. He was thinking her clothes looked very far from poor. And yet he knew he was no judge of values in clothes. If they suited a woman, he would not know whether they cost ten dollars or five hundred. Nina Wingate, he recalled, wore beautiful clothes, and they were not expensive.

"Perhaps not," she admitted. "You see, while I was raised in the hills, I am not a native. My father was a Swiss watchmaker, and my mother a French lady. Soon after their romance my father came to America with a colony of our countrymen. He found his way into the Ozarks, where he had a great scheme for a coöperative colony to plant vineyards. It soon played out—and left father on a little, rocky farm. I was just two years old then; and father began to seriously study farming. He read all the papers and books—for he had been taught English in his youth; and he went from one experiment to another—failing in all of them."

She continued to tell stories of their early life in the hills—very interesting stories; and Lafe found himself wondering if they were really true. He saw now the signs of foreign blood in her—the French animation in her face and gesture; and there was a slight accent—no doubt she had learned both tongues. She was certainly sincere, of course it was all true—and very interesting. Then he recalled that when Nina Wingate told him anything he never wondered if it were true.

"One of my earliest recollections," she continued, "is of the time when, as a little girl, I gathered peas—cowpeas. We children had sacks swung around our necks, and went along the rows picking the dry pods and dropping them into the sack. We piled them on a wagon sheet at the end of the row, and father flailed them with a stick.

"Cowpeas was really the best experiment father ever tried—only it was so much work to get the seed that way every year. That is what gave father his notion to make a machine to gather—and that," she smiled, "is what I am getting to at last.

"Father invented a combined cowpea picker and thresher—and has been working on it for five years. That was why we left the farm and went to

Sheffield, so he could work in the machine shops.

"We sold the farm to Burke Moore," —she sighed and shrugged her shoulders—"or more likely we gave it to him. Father did not know about trades. He got fifteen hundred dollars for one hundred and sixty acres. Would you call that a good trade, Mr. Jason?"

"Hardly," said Lafe.

"You see"—she threw out her hands helplessly—"Mr. Jason, none of us know anything about business—least of all poor, dear papa. But he's a fine workman. He's worked in the shops at Sheffield in the day and on his invention at night. It's all perfected now —and he's got it patented.

"And I"—again the helpless gesture —"started out day before yesterday to find some one with money to help him. I came here, because more cowpeas are grown here than other places in the State—and Springfield is not so big. I didn't have the courage to try Kansas City.

"Just by accident, Mr. Jason," she said, with beautiful simplicity, "or maybe Providence, I heard the man talk to you of barbed wire—and then I spoke to you—I liked you, and said: 'He's the one to help papa—and me!'"

Lafe believed her. He could do nothing else. A girl with eyes like that could not tell anything but the truth.

"Have you plans—a sketch of the machine?" he asked.

Oh, yes, she had them. She opened a small valise and took out a folded sheet. She moved her chair up beside his and spread the drawing upon his knees.

"There is the machine." She looked up at him from the corner of her eyes, with the pride of a child. "I drew it."

Lafe asked questions. He, too, had picked cowpeas by hand and threshed the seed out with a pole.

She knew the machine perfectly. She explained each part, and exactly how it worked.

"Here in the hills where the ground is rough," she said, "the gathering machine and the thresher will be separate. The picker will gather in the peas, and the thresher will be stationary at the end of the field, and will be run by a small gasoline engine."

"It looks good," said Lafe, without any effort to conceal his interest. "What sort of a proposition do you want to make?"

"Papa hasn't money to have them made," she replied. "We want some honest man to go in with him and furnish the money to make them. And then you'll divide even on the profits—and both will get rich! Oh, immensely rich, Mr. Jason!" Her enthusiasm was magnetic.

"How many acres will it gather in a day, do you think?" he asked.

"Papa says it will gather ten acres," she answered. "And then it will strip the pods from the vines without hurting the hay much. The pods can be gathered before the vines dry. The thresher will even thresh green pods."

"What will the machine cost to make?"

"A hundred and twenty-five dollars will pay for making both the picker and the thresher. They shall sell for two hundred and fifty. And think how lots and lots of them will sell, Mr. Jason!"

"Have your father come to-night, Miss Hassler, and I'll go over it with you to-morrow, and give you my answer."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Mr. Hill Billy!" She impulsively grabbed his hand in both hers. "I knew you would —and I can trust you. Poor, dear papa needs help so much. His money's gone, and he's old in the face worrying about this."

Lafe went down to the square and caught a street car to Doling Park. He

sat down under a tree, took out his pencil, and made a dot on the back of a blank envelope. Then he studied for ten minutes and made another dot with the pencil. It took him three hours to make five dots; but each dot was more than a black spot—it stood for a conclusion—and he connected them all up with lines.

"Yes," he nodded, "that is what I'll do."

Then a slow grin came over his face as he remembered Uncle Daniel. Uncle Dan's most fearful caution was to have nothing to do with patent rights, and to shun women. And here a perfectly strange young woman had convinced him with a perfectly strange invention in an hour.

"Oh, well"—the smile left, and a serious pucker gathered between his eyes—"she knows what she is talking about—— And"—the grin came back—"I know what I am thinking about."

IV.

When he met old man Hassler next morning, Lafe felt positively guilty for even wondering if the daughter was telling the truth. The old man fitted in every particular the story the girl had told. He was of that type of skilled dreamer who has the wisdom of a genius and the hands of an artist, but the business sense of a child.

He explained his invention more technically, but not more clearly, than his daughter had done. Nannie was present, and prompted her father here and there with a question or suggestion.

They had finished and waited like two eager children for an affirmative answer. The hill billy sat looking out of the window speculatively. A late apple tree in the back yard of the boarding house was just in bloom, and the white-and-pink petals reminded him somehow of Nina Wingate; and he wondered what she would say to this venture.

"Mr. Ja-son"—it was almost a timid interruption to his thoughts, and the girl gave a quaint little foreign emphasis to the last syllable of his name. The girl had crossed the room and stood quite near, looking down at him; and her eyes were very persuasive—"Mr. Jason, you are going to help poor, dear papa, are you not? He's worked so hard, and if this fails—we'll all be so very, very poor. If you, good Mr. Hill Billy"—she smiled caressingly—"only help, I know we'll all be very, very rich."

For a space of twenty seconds Lafe met her eyes steadily. Hers never wavered, the pupils dilated, the lids drooped just a shade—but candor and innocence and pleading filled them to the brim and overflowed.

"Yes," said Lafe deliberately, "I will help. How much will it take?"

The old Swiss started excitedly to speak. The daughter gave him a glance and hastened to answer:

"Ten thousand dollars will do it very nicely."

"I think I can put in that much," Lafe said, "if the machine works."

"Oh, glory, glory!" said the girl, dancing ecstatically, "you good, good Mr. Hill Billy!" She grabbed Lafe's hand in both of hers and impetuously kissed it.

Lafe thought she was very interesting.

"Shall we draw up the papers now?" she asked, a little anxious lest the good luck vanish before her very eyes. "Oh, let's do! Then we can rest—poor papa has worried so he has hardly slept for weeks."

"Yes," assented Lafe. "If my terms suit you, we may as well draw up the contract."

"Oh, they will suit," declared the girl. "I'll telephone for a lawyer—a young man that used to live near us."

She hastened downstairs and telephoned.

When she returned, Lafe said:

"It is not to be a partnership. I don't think I would work well in partnership."

"Not even with a woman?" Nannie Hassler lifted her arched brows and puckered her lips teasingly.

"Possibly with a woman." Lafe smiled. "Provided I held a majority stock. But just now I think this plan will be best for all of us: Your father thinks ten thousand dollars will start him manufacturing his machine. If there is a fortune in it, he ought to have it."

"But oh, Mr. Jason, you have been so good, we want you to have a fortune, too," broke in the girl.

"Thank you. I think I will get my share. I will furnish your father ten thousand dollars to start. I am to have the first five hundred machines and to have exclusive patent right of that half of the State south of the Missouri River—exclusive power to sell county rights, to use the machine or sell to individuals in this territory—and I am to buy any further machines I may want at your father's factory at one hundred and fifty dollars each.

"That, you see, gives you the capital to start; gives you a profit of seventy-five dollars each on the first five hundred machines, and twenty-five on future orders, and leaves you your patent and all the world but half a State."

"It is too generous," said old Hassler.

"Far too generous," assented Nannie. "But, papa, we will make him take part of the money we make."

Lafe was ill at ease; he scraped the chair on the floor and shifted his leg from knee back to the floor.

"But, of course, I am not to furnish any money until the machine is tested."

"Not till then?" said Hassler.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nannie. "But, Mr. Jason," she hastened, "it will work—you can see it will work—and papa can't go on making them without money."

"I will go home with your father," Lafe said, "and examine his model very carefully. Then if I am sure, I will furnish a little money—just enough to start, until we can take one into the field in the fall and actually try it. Lots of things," he finished cautiously, "work good, you know, until they go to work."

"I know *this* will work," said Hassler.

"So do I," said the daughter.

Nannie Hassler met the lawyer in the hall, and, after a little conversation, brought him up to the parlor. Lafe stated his proposition. The lawyer made notes; and asked them to come to his office that afternoon and sign the contract.

They did, and all then left at six o'clock for Sheffield to further investigate the full-sized model that Hassler had set up.

Lafe enjoyed that trip. The girl was very amusing and very interesting. Her quaint little touch of foreignness gave her vivacity, piquancy, and instead of her smiles and pretty speeches and arch looks appearing coquettish, as in another girl, in her they seemed perfectly natural—at least to Lafe.

He found the house and the shop and the machine exactly as described by Nannie. The mother was dead, but there were a younger sister and brother in school. Miss Hassler was an interesting hostess—and Lafe again felt very guilty for even speculating on whether or not everything she said was true—and honest. It must be, and he had an impulse to pay over the whole ten thousand, and let the old man start his factory right. But—perhaps it was better to let him work it out slowly. So Lafe advanced one thousand dollars to start the work.

"I can let you have another thousand by July, if necessary," he said, when starting.

"Thank you," said the old Swiss. "I can get along with that."

"If I can find some work to help with the living," said the girl, with a momentary troubled face, "papa could use all his time on the machine. You know, of course, we wouldn't want to use any of your money for that."

Lafe stood a moment on the wooden step of the little cottage and looked across at the smoking machine shops near. It would be too bad for her to hunt work in places like this.

"Can you use a typewriter?"

She nodded brightly. "Some, and I can soon learn more—I learn really fast, Mr. Jason."

"I am sure you do." He laughed. "I am a little that way myself. I tell you, I'm going to open an office as soon as I get back to Springfield—I'll have lots of writing to do. If you want to come and be my secretary, I'll give you fifteen dollars a week."

"Oh, will you?" Her face lighted, and she seized his hand impulsively. "You are so good, Mr. Hill Billy. I'll be joyful to come. Sister can keep house, and that will help out wonderfully."

Three days later Lafe had rented and furnished a small office on the ground floor of an old brick building near the Frisco tracks. Over the door was the sign:

THE JASON SEED COMPANY.

The next day Nannie Hassler began work as secretary. Lafe had been busy gathering names, and had a stack of two thousand printed letters.

"Your first job will be to mail a letter to each of these addresses," he told her.

"Oh, excellent!" she said gayly. "That is very easy. And I'll learn to take dictation, if you want."

"That will not be necessary," said Lafe. "But learn the typewriter—there will be lots of writing."

Miss Hassler started to work at once, but read a copy of the letter first:

JASON SEED COMPANY,
SPRINGFIELD, MO.

DEAR SIR: I will pay you two dollars a bushel cash for any clean cowpea seed you have on hand. Very truly,

LAFE JASON.

"Oh, I know one," said the girl, turning from the typewriter, "who raises most cowpeas of all—Mr. Burke Moore, of Attler. He has over four thousand acres of land, and sows lots and lots of peas. He's the one who bought our place."

"Do not send him one," said Lafe. "I'll look after him personally." He grinned to himself, wondering if she could catch on to his campaign. He did not want to buy cowpea seed. He would, if offered, but that was not the object. These letters were merely the preliminary campaign—to teach the hill farmers forcibly that cowpeas were valuable.

Next morning he laid out several days' work for his secretary.

"I'm going to the country," he said. "I want to see Mr. Moore and several others—I may be out a week or two."

But he was gone only two days. Burke Moore was not at home, and he decided to cut short his work with the other farmers until he had talked things over with him.

He returned to Springfield about three in the afternoon; and just as he drove up to the livery stable a fine team of blacks, with a new buggy, were driving away. He only caught a glimpse of the driver's back, but he needed only a glimpse.

It was his bitterest enemy, Samuel T. Birkins, of the Big Brick Store at Wahoo City.

"Now I wonder," said Lafe, as he went down the street, "what he is doing here." As he turned the corner at Booneville Street Lafe stopped and stared hard.

The blacks were standing at the curb in front of his office, and Birkins was handing Nannie Hassler into the buggy.

V.

Lafe Jason turned back around the corner. He did not want Birkins and Miss Hassler to know he saw them. He went back uptown and walked around the square twice, so intent on his own thoughts that he ran into two or three other people—or they ran into him, he didn't know which.

He turned at South Street, with sudden purposefulness, and went to the Crescent National Bank and got his lock box.

For an hour he studied the contract which the attorney had drawn up for him and old man Hassler.

Seeing the president at leisure, the hill billy approached him, with the contract in his hand.

"Do you know that attorney?" He pointed to the signature—"Thomas W. Warren."

The old banker put on his nose glasses and looked at it.

"I know who he is; but he is a new man here."

"Do you think he is on the square?" the hill billy asked, with some anxiety.

The old banker laughed quietly. "My son, one does not ask is a lawyer square? He asks is he shrewd and is he on my side?"

Jason returned his box to the safety vault, went to his boarding house, and waited until half past five. His secretary would undoubtedly be back to the office by that time.

She was, and was manifestly surprised to see him.

"Why, Mr. Hill Billy!" She jumped up, smiling, and held out her hand. "I did not expect you so soon, but I'm glad you are back, very glad, for this is a sort of lonesome place when one is all alone."

Lafe looked at her steadily, penetratingly. She blushed, as though misunderstanding the look. There was not a sign of guilt or treachery in her clear gray eyes.

"A friend of yours came to see you to-day," she said, returning to her typewriter. "A Mr. Birkins, of Wahoo City. He said he'd known you a long, long time, and was awfully sorry you were not here. He was so interested in the seed business and in our great invention."

Lafe was experiencing a variety of sensations not translatable in words.

"Is that so?" he said dryly.

"Yes"—she turned large, innocent eyes upon him—"and he knew where a man had a lot of cowpeas to sell—a Mr. Johnson, four miles north of town. He took me out to see him, and he agreed to sell them to you at two dollars a bushel—I got him to put it in writing. Here it is!"

She brought the written agreement to him, with the pride of a little girl who has made her first doll dress.

"Was that right?" She was smiling down at him, eager for approval.

"Yes, that was right," he said, without enthusiasm. He was looking steadily at a rubber eraser on his desk. "But, Miss Hassler"—it was a great relief to find that she was innocent of any treachery—"that man Birkins is not a friend of mine—but my worst enemy."

"Oh!" It was a surprised, sharp little cry. "Oh, I'm so glad!" He saw the color mount to her cheeks. "I didn't like him at all—I thought he was horrid; but if he was your friend, I didn't want to be rude."

"Well, you can be rude enough to hit him with a club the next time he

comes—and it won't hurt my feelings at all."

"But—Mr. Jason—oh, I hope I haven't—I told him about our invention—and what wonderful money we're going to make. Will that hurt? Was that wrong?" She was genuinely distressed—almost to tears.

"It won't matter," the hill billy said, shutting his mouth grimly. He was thinking that Birkins would have found out sooner or later, anyway. It seemed there was nothing to do but fight his old bitter enemies all the way to the ditch.

"I'm so sorry," she said, as she went softly to the typewriter and began addressing letters.

And Lafe felt guilty as a question involuntarily flashed in his mind: "I wonder if she is?"

Three days later Lafe drove south toward Burke Moore's. The spring was in full glory over the hills; the bright green wheat was tall enough to ripple before the south wind, and the corn was being plowed the second time; the fields were astir with laborers, and all the furry and feathered creatures were at play in the woods. Lafe felt a great upspringing of happiness. The enterprise upon which he was bent gathered magnitude as it went. And he no longer had the slightest doubt of the loyalty and innocence of his secretary.

Burke Moore was a sort of baron of the hills. He owned two thousand acres in one body, and innumerable small tracts scattered up and down the creek. Besides, the hill folk talked in the cabins, with awesome tone, of the uncounted mortgages he held on land and stock. It was current belief that if all Moore's mortgages were stacked one upon the other, they would be two feet high. Jason had never seen Burke Moore, but he had heard much of him.

The house sat a quarter of a mile back from the road, and, as the hill billy drove in, he saw a man which he guessed was Moore riding across the field. He sat straight as a cavalryman, and rode straight across a newly plowed cornfield, reckless of hills of corn his horse trampled down.

Two men were plowing on the far side of the field. The rider dashed up to them, and, from the few swift, emphatic gestures, Lafe gathered that Moore was cursing them like a river pirate. They hastily transferred their teams and plows to another field, and the rider returned.

Lafe had hitched his team by the barn and was waiting for him. As Moore rode up he saw that he was a man of perhaps sixty, with black beard and white eyebrows. His beard was bristly and in a whorl, which let his mouth show through, as though a whirlwind had squatted on a bunch of grass, twisting it aside until the fangs of an old sickle showed through.

Just as he alighted a hired man approached and asked for directions. The old fellow straightened up and pointed to the back field, and gave his orders like the captain of a liner.

But when he turned to Jason, he held out his hand and greeted him with the easy, cordial friendliness of a cigar drummer. He talked freely and interestingly of his crops and stock and the country. He showed Lafe his barns, his stock pens, and his house.

Lafe broached the subject of cowpeas.

"The finest crop a man ever raised," said Moore emphatically. "Good for the soil as clover, better hay than anything that grows—stock of all kinds will leave any food you can throw out and run to a forkful of cowpea hay. Only difficulty is getting seed."

They talked until midnight that night. Lafe discovered his host was a very shrewd but uneducated man. He had made his way by an unusual combina-

tion of quick wits and hard work. He was a driver; and yet he had the soft, pleasant—was it oily?—side which was very social and persuasive.

The hill billy told him of his plans —of the invention he was interested in.

Moore was at first skeptical. "I bought one a few years ago—paid a hundred and fifty dollars for it. Wouldn't work. It would strip the peas from the vines all right, but could not sack them. It dropped over half of them in the rows."

Lafe explained in detail the Hassler picker. Moore got interested and then enthusiastic.

"Boy," he said, clapping the hill billy on the shoulder, "if it is as good as it looks, you are a rich man. Why, fellows would give you half to gather the seed for them. If you can prove to me this fall that machine will work, I'll sow five hundred acres of cowpeas next spring; and I'll make every fellow on all the places I'm interested in sow from five to twenty acres."

Lafe entered into an agreement with him to demonstrate the machine on his farm, and, if it proved successful, to furnish him five machines the next year. He also outlined his scheme for getting a big sowing of cowpeas through the south part of the State.

"A bright scheme—a bright scheme!" Moore's eyes gleamed appreciatively. "Young man, if I had as smart a partner as you, I'd be a millionaire before I die."

Lafe returned to Springfield, his mind seething with new ideas. His prospects broadened all the time. He would gather four thousand more names, and extend his cowpea campaign. He began to count his possible profits, and they staggered him.

"Impossible," he said to himself. "A man doesn't get rich like that in two or three years.

"But why not?" he demanded of himself. "If a man has the brains and the grit—and fortune comes his way—why not?" It would be big news for Nina Wingate.

He gave Miss Hassler a week's vacation that she might go home for a visit, and he took the train for Wahoo City.

"I've got to find out what Birkins and his gang are up to," he told himself as the train pulled out. "I want to know what he is going to do about it."

But really that was not what he most wanted to know.

VI.

Lafe Jason sat on the counter of his store at Wahoo City, eating peanuts from a bag at his side, and talked with Nina as she told about the stock and trade and the news since he left.

"Nina"—Lafe jumped down from the counter and brushed the peanut shells from his clothes—"it is too fine a day to stay indoors. Let us go down to the bridge and throw rocks into the creek. Bob and Molly can manage all the trade there will be the rest of the evening."

"All right, I'd love to go." Nina was already pinning on her hat. She had two good assistants in the store now, whom she could always leave in charge.

Lafe wore a smart spring suit and a panama hat, which he had bought since going to Springfield. As they went down the street he never felt so buoyant and sure of himself as now. Always before it had been a bitter fight at every step, with the odds against him, and the outcome doubtful. Each time victory came as a sort of surprise. Subconsciously of course he expected to win, knew he had to win. Yet fears and doubts came thick with every conflict. But now he could even smile at his old enemies, and feel superior to this little, dingy country town, with its perpetual wrangling and penurious

grabbing after sixty-nine per cent profits on spool cotton and penny ribbon.

Ben Hilman, the rumbling, profane old gouger, was in the door of his conglomerate store, and Lafe threw at him a cheerful "Good afternoon."

Hilman spat and swore and went indoors. The hill billy laughed joyfully. Hilman's share in the loss of that last land scrap with Jason was too galling for anything but oblivion to heal. Birkins, the craftiest and most relentless of Lafe's enemies, came to the door of the Big Brick Store, but looked clear over the heads of the young couple passing laughingly along the walk. Lafe made no effort to speak to him. Even in his happiest, most forgiving moods, the hill billy never saw Samuel T. Birkins without an involuntary clenching of the fingers in his palms.

But to the debonair Horatio Ames who was out on the platform of his pretentious store, with the inevitable flower in his buttonhole, Lafe waved an airy greeting. Ames nodded reservedly and lifted his hat.

At the post-office corner they came face to face with Alfred Walters, cashier of the bank; Lafe smiled and, with a courtly inclination of his head, lifted high his new panama hat. Walters' round, pinkish face grew deep red, he bobbed his head nervously, made a slight tip of his hat, and turned aside toward the bank. Lafe, grinning, glanced down at Nina and saw she was blushing.

They crossed the bridge and followed down the stream for a short distance, jumping from rock to rock at the edge of the creek and splashing the water like children.

The full-leafed trees along the bank threw shadows half across the stream, the grass and wild flowers covered the bank, and the clear, swift water gurgled and foamed and bubbled around and over the bowlders.

On the bank, they sat down on the grass under a hackberry tree. The May air was full of unexpressed sentiment, and the perfume of the wild grape filled the valley.

"Nina." Lafe locked his hands around one knee and leaned against the tree very thoughtfully. The girl looked down and pulled at a bunch of grass. Her hat was on the ground beside her, and the soft brown hair fell over her temples and the edge of her forehead. "Nina," continued Lafe, "you remember the time when I had left home and started to Wahoo City, and stopped by the spring branch near the milk gap at your place until you came, with a milk pail on your arm, at sundown?"

"Yes, Lafe."

"And you remember I told you I was going to make a fortune?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am." The ring in his tone was sure now—the ring of one who not only means to, but knows how he is going to do it.

"I knew you would." She looked up at him. In her eyes was that frank confidence which had always nerved him to his utmost effort in the time of doubt.

"I know you did, little partner." He said "little partner" with lingering gentleness, and put out his hand and patted hers that was busy pulling grass, and his fingers closed around hers and held them fast.

"I know you did, and you have helped me in every way. Now I'm going to tell you how I'll make it."

It came to him as a curious side thought that no shadow of question arose in his mind whether it would be safe to tell her his plans. There was no question about Nina's loyalty. When she spoke he knew it was exactly that way—at least so far as she saw. And she usually saw a long ways, and straightways into any subject.

"I've had the most wonderful piece

of luck, Nina." He took his hand from hers and drew out of his pocket a drawing of the cowpea harvester. "I've bought the patent right for south Missouri of the most useful invention this country ever saw. I get the exclusive right in fifty-six counties and five hundred machines for ten thousand dollars."

"A patent right, Lafe?" Nina looked up at him in surprise—a hint of worry in her brown eyes. She shared the general suspicion of all patent rights, mining schemes, and other unusual ways of getting rich—but usually ways of getting poor.

Lafe went into it enthusiastically. He told of the barbed-wire man and of the girl on the porch who overheard and of the interview next morning—and of the contract. He went into details of his plans for exploiting the machine.

"It's a fortune, Nina, a fortune! No twenty per cent on cotton-goods sales; but a real, big, live fortune!"

Flushed with his own enthusiasm, he paused for her congratulations.

She was looking out into the stream, her eyes fixed on a bubble at the edge of the drift where the water swirled under—the bubble eddied back and forth and around the swirl suction—and she wondered how long until it went under. A minute passed, and she said not a word. At the first words of his plan, a doubt, light and intangible as a wisp of May cloud, had floated into her mind. As he went on the doubt had deepened and thickened, until now it was as dark as twilight in a gulch.

"Why, Nina," his tone was aggrieved, "you don't seem a bit glad."

"I hope you'll do well with it." She did not take her eyes from the bubble over the drift. Her tone was as chill and impersonal as the mist in the twilight gulch.

"Why, Nina"—he was genuinely astonished—"you've always been enthusiastic about my plans before—you've always believed in me—I didn't look for you to pour cold water." Nothing hurts half so bad as criticism where praise is expected.

Slowly her eyes came up to his—troubled brown eyes, hinting at tears; her lips trembled.

"Lafe"—the words came reluctantly—"you are being deceived. They have fixed it up—and you'll lose every dollar."

He expressed very emphatic dissent. "I know what I am doing, Nina. I thought you had faith in me."

Again her lips trembled, and her eyes went down to the grass, which she began to pull nervously.

"It is she, Lafe. The girl is fooling you. They'll rob you—of every dollar—and you've worked so hard for it."

Then they argued the matter—or at least he did. She did nothing but beg him to get out of it some way. He refused most shortly, and they almost quarreled; and parted at the door of her boarding house in a very alien mood.

Nina spent the best hours of the night crying; and next morning telephoned Alfred Walters at the bank, accepting his often-repeated invitation to go driving with him Sunday afternoon.

Lafe took the evening train for Springfield, and, when he got off, wired Miss Hassler to come back at once.

VII.

Nannie Hassler arrived at four o'clock the next day, and came to the office looking as fresh and cool as though she had not ridden eight hours on a slow, smoky train.

"I'm so glad you wired me, good Mr. Hill Billy." She held to his hand with a slight clinging pressure, and looked at him with frank gladness in her gray eyes. "I'd have been very, very lone-

some to have stayed up there a whole week. This work is so interesting—and I want to earn my salary. I wonder why you didn't give the place to some other girl?" She quizzed him out of the corners of her eyes, as though daring him to tell.

"I didn't want any other girl," he smiled. "Now really—I'm going to put you to work in earnest. You'll want to resign in less than a month."

"Oh, just try me, Mr. Jason." She sat down quickly at the typewriter and pulled up her sleeves and made ready as if for terrific work. "I'm a terrible worker, Mr. Jason."

And she really was. No secretary ever did more work, and did it well, than Nannie Hassler did that summer.

Lafe followed a carefully conceived plan for the earning of his future—it meant the welfare of others, too.

Following his two hundred bids for cowpea seed at two dollars a bushel—he got only twenty bushels; there was no seed in the country, as he knew—he sent out ten thousand brief bulletins, prepared by the State agricultural college, on the benefits to the soil of cowpeas.

A few weeks later another bulletin on the value of cowpea hay went out.

Next he prepared a very strong, brief letter, urging the farmers to get seed and prepare for a big cowpea sowing the next year. He showed in striking figures how much greater the returns on it would be than the ordinary crops, and how much less the work.

He secured the indorsement of the secretary of the State board of agriculture. In fact, sent the letters out, with his permission, over his signature. These letters Lafe sent in sealed envelopes to eleven thousand farmers in the southern part of the State.

By September 1st Lafe found his expenses were running strong. He had spent nearly two thousand dollars during the summer, merely in a mail campaign to create cowpea sentiment. There could be no returns until the next year. He saw that by the time he had paid the ten thousand on the patent right, he would barely have enough, even with borrowing to the limit of the store's credit, to keep up the campaign through the winter and spring.

Hassler had finished fifty machines, and early in September Lafe took one out to Burke Moore's and gave it a test.

It worked perfectly; even better than they hoped. Moore was very enthusiastic. They found one machine would pick and thresh ten acres a day easily. It required only four men. One to drive, one to load the bag of pea pods and haul them to the thresher, and two to operate the thresher.

Hassler had come down for the trial, and the daughter, of course, was there. Burke Moore, in honor of the occasion, invited in the neighbors, and had a big dinner and a country dance.

Hassler and his daughter and Lafe were sent to town next day in Moore's automobile.

"You are satisfied now?" Hassler asked when they went to the station. He was hurrying back to his factory.

"Perfectly," said Lafe. "Go on with the work as fast as you can."

"I can only go slow," said the old man, "for we haven't machines to make the parts. When I get some more money, I'll make them fast."

"Will five thousand help you?" Lafe was not to pay more than the initial two thousand except as the machines were delivered.

"Oh, very much—I could get all the help and machines I now need," said the old man.

Lafe took out his check book and wrote a check for five thousand and handed it to the old Swiss.

"Ship my machines as fast as finished," Lafe said. "I've arranged for

storage room here. I want to have all five hundred finished and ready for use by July."

Lafe was in his office next morning, putting into letters a fresh batch of ideas.

There are men whose enthusiasm only boils at close range. They can work like a flood tearing at a dam if there is a tremendous roar with them and the wall of opposition is already cracking. They sometimes make a big strike; but always fail in the wind-up. There are other men who run on like a spring branch in dry weather, piling up power in the reservoir, getting ready for the big work when opportunity is at its flood. Such men fail sometimes, but they succeed many times.

Lafe Jason was that sort of man. He had been spending money and working five months. There was a year of work and spending ahead before a dollar of returns; and yet he put in eight to fourteen hours a day, creating in the hill farmers a craving for a patch of cowpeas. He sent out bulletins, extracts from farm-paper articles, and personal letters; he went through the country talking with farmers, and, as representative of Wahoo County, not a farm meeting in the south part of the State but billed the "Honorable Lafe Jason of Wahoo City" for an address on cowpeas. The State agricultural college backed and abetted him in every way possible, for it was good doctrine.

But perhaps his best, certainly his most active, aid came from Burke Moore. Lafe visited Moore often and discussed with him his plans. He was always cordial and confidential with Lafe, and they got on capitally.

Lafe returned to Wahoo City once a month, and saw the store was running well. At these times Nina Wingate, his manager, and he were quite formal to each other, and dealt strictly with reports and figures. Usually after one of these meetings Lafe returned to Springfield feeling as though the cloud with the silver lining had got soot on it; and Nina had a good cry after she had gone to bed.

When Billy Potter, of Wahoo City, returned to college after the Christmas holidays, he dropped into Lafe's office.

"By the way, Lafe," said Billy, grinning, "I want to put in my application for manager of the store."

"I've got a manager," said Lafe, "and a good one."

"I know"—Billy's grin seemed to carry some special inside information—"but when she quits."

"She is not going to quit, so far as I know." Lafe nevertheless felt a sudden uneasiness.

"I think she will," said Billy. "Folks say she and Alfred Walters are to be married early in the spring. They been going together mighty regular here lately."

Lafe didn't do much work that day. He spent most of the time jabbing holes in his blotter with the little blade of his pocketknife and calling women uncomplimentary names: "Fickle, unreliable, and the more you do for them the less they appreciate it."

Then later in the afternoon he got around to himself in the name business and said "Fool!" with every emphatic adjective in his vocabulary attached.

"Miss Hassler"—he swung around in his chair—"how would you like to go to the theater to-night?"

"Fine!" She looked up from her work and smiled very appreciatively. "I'd love to go."

He telephoned for tickets.

A few weeks later Billy Potter wrote home to his sister—and she told it to Martha Peery, who was a friendly enemy of Nina Wingate's—that Lafe Jason was going to marry his secretary.

By the middle of February Lafe had received two hundred machines complete and ready for work. He had; he

knew, created a strong cowpea sentiment through all the southern part of the State, especially in the mountain section of the southwest. And now, as a final clincher, he sent a letter to ten thousand farmers describing the new invention. One paragraph read:

> Cowpeas is a profitable crop, merely for the hay and fertilizer. But now this machine will strip the pods without seriously damaging the hay, and give you from five to fifteen dollars cash per acre for the seed. Plant cowpeas. Sow a big patch. Sow them early in May.

He went out Saturday to spend Sunday with Burke Moore. Moore was his strongest dependence. He had promised to sow five hundred acres himself, and see that his tenants sowed five hundred more.

Moore fully understood Lafe's plan and appreciated its shrewdness.

"You see," said Lafe, "I absolutely control this invention in the south half of the State. In these fifty-two counties no one can make, sell, or use the Hassler picker and thresher without my consent. I shall not sell a machine. I may rent a few, but doubt it. I plan to train a bunch of fellows to run them—it is simple; and send out one man with each machine, the farmer to furnish the rest of the help and board my man. I'll pick and thresh the pods for half. If the crop is good and averages ten bushels to the acre, that will give them five bushels to their share, which means ten dollars an acre as a pure gift to them.

"It also means"—Lafe's face lighted with enthusiasm—"that if I can get five thousand acres planted, and they only average five bushels to the acre, I'll take in twenty-five thousand dollars—twenty thousand of which will be clear. The next year it will double that."

Moore laughed appreciatively. "You are surely a lucky dog. You've got a fortune, all right; and you ought to have, for you have a head on your shoulders instead of a turnip. Now there is going to be just one big drawback—maybe two," Moore continued, puckering the line between his white eyebrows and pushing the bristly black beard away from his mouth. "I've been intending to speak to you of it for a long time. The farmers who ought to sow cowpeas, who need them the worst, will not have any seed. They are the sort of fellows who sell their corn to pay their debts in the fall, kill their shotes half fattened, and hunt rabbits most of the winter to buy coffee. They never have any money—and it takes cash to furnish cowpea seed."

"That's true." Lafe had thought something about that himself. "But I can't do it," he said, shaking his head doubtfully. "I'll have every dollar invested and be borrowed to the limit before fall."

"There is another thing," went on Moore. "The chance of five dollars an acre next fall does not appeal to the shiftless fellow very much. If he knew exactly what he was going to get, and get some of it right away, he'd be for cowpeas as strong as a possum for persimmons."

Lafe admitted the truth of this. But did not see any way to help it—not this year.

"I've been thinking over a plan," Moore went on, "that seems to me may be better for you, and, at the same time, will make some coin for me. I've got some surplus money. Suppose I go to these farmers with contracts—I'll take my machine and get out a half dozen other fellows, and offer this:

" 'You sow five, ten, or twenty acres of cowpeas. I'll furnish seed and directions. If the crop is good, I'll pay you five dollars an acre cash for the pods—and give you the hay. If it is poor, I'll pay you two dollars and a half. And I'll pay you a dollar cash down as soon as the peas come up.' You see how that will catch them?"

Lafe nodded. He knew that was exactly what would appeal to most of the shiftless ones.

"Those who prefer," went on Moore, "we'll give a contract for half the peas."

"It is a fine idea," admitted Lafe—"but what do you want out of it?"

Moore hesitated a moment. "Well, you've agreed to gather and thresh my five hundred acres for one-fourth the crop. You'll get rich at that. Now suppose I can offer you twenty thousand acres—couldn't you do it all for one-fourth?"

Lafe knew he could, and make a small fortune at it. But he was not making any donations.

"The trouble," he said, "with the small crops—many of them will be poor. There'll be only a day's work, and then move—and the returns will be small. No, I would not do it for a fourth."

They compromised on a third.

"I'll get out at once," said Moore, "and sign them up. You better give me a written agreement to pick and thresh them for a third." He laughed. "You see you have me, because you have the machine—and I'll have to accept any terms you make."

Lafe wrote out and signed an agreement to pick and thresh them for a third of the crop.

"The whole thing is fixed now," he told Miss Hassler when he returned to the office Monday. "Moore takes charge of the field work—and signs them up—I've nothing to do but wait until the crop grows—and then gather in the fortune."

"Won't that be nice?" said Miss Hassler, looking at the typewriter instead of him.

VIII.

Lafe Jason saw no real reason why he should continue his office at Springfield during the summer—except that Miss Hassler would be out of a job. Now that Burke Moore had taken over the entire control of furnishing seed and signing up the farmers to plant cowpeas, there was really nothing more for Jason to do until harvesting time—and that would be in the fall.

But he would hate to let her go. They were really very closely pushed for money—old man Hassler was putting every dollar he got into enlarging his factory; and the fifteen dollars a week the daughter earned was a great help. Besides, Lafe readily admitted, he would miss her. She was very interesting, and she had been developing a spirit of lightness and playfulness in him that he had never known before. They had been enjoying some jolly times together.

While the hill billy was debating whether to close the office and try to find some other work for her, or to keep it open and play at work that summer, she turned from her typewriter and rested her elbow on the desk, and with her small white chin resting on her thumb, two fingers upon her cheek, she looked at him drolly out of the corners of her eyes.

"There was another man from your town here yesterday—a Mr. Walters."

"There was?" Lafe did not conceal his surprise.

She nodded demurely. "I guess he's also not very much of a friend of yours," she said. "He didn't say he was an enemy"—she pronounced it "enimee"—"but he didn't seem to be much friend. Only he said the girl who runs your store is very, very much a friend of his. I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't here to buy a ring."

She smiled a romantic sort of smile, but her gray eyes watched rather shrewdly the color deepen in Lafe's face.

"I don't like him," she said, looking down at the eraser on the typewriter table. "I despise him!" She said this

with such sudden intensity that Lafe jumped and asked in surprise: "Why?"

"Oh," she answered nonchalantly, "I like smart men—not stingy ones. He used to be in a bank here. Papa tried to borrow money from him once to get one of his patents—offered him a share in the patent. He wanted just a little money; but he smiled and rubbed that chubby face and shook his head."

"What did he come for?" Lafe asked.

"Oh, I don't know." She shrugged her shoulders and made a bored gesture. "To see you, maybe, to see me maybe. He didn't say—only he asked where you were."

"You didn't tell him anything?"

"No, siree;" she used Lafe's phrase for emphasis, and used it prettily. "I tell nobody anything any more that professes to be one of your friends—until you tell me he ought to know."

Lafe wondered if she had not. He felt sure she did not think she had—but maybe Walters had learned what he came to find out. It was cheeky of his enemies, coming to his office in his absence—but they were a cheeky gang.

"By the way, we won't have anything to do for a while," he said, with a sudden purpose. "You can go home for a visit of two or three weeks—or a month. I'll continue your wages on condition you come back any time I wire for you."

"Oh, yes," she said readily, "I'll come back any time. It is very, very lovely of you, Mr. Hill Billy—I need to go home for a little while. My baby sister is to graduate in June and I must make her some clothes."

He saw she was glad to go; and thought to himself that he would pay her wages for a month. He would permanently discontinue the office.

She was putting on her spring coat, for it was quitting time. Her hand caught in the sleeve, and he hastened to help her. She turned and looked up at him, her face quite close to his, and there was a sort of wistful uncertainty in her wide gray eyes.

"You are not sending me home because—because you are displeased with me?" The slightest hint of a pout puckered her lips.

"No, indeed!" he said warmly. "You've been a bully good secretary—and an awfully nice girl."

A smile came—a real flitting, dancing smile. Her lips parted a little, her color grew pink, and her eyes looked deep and misty. "You are so good, Mr. Hill Billy—so good to me, dear Mr. Hill Billy."

His hands went out in an unaccustomed but not awkward movement to slip them around her. Instead, he rested them on her shoulders, and looked down at her, his own face burning red. The hill billy had grown up alone in the deepest sense. He had always lived within himself. Women were sacred to him. A kiss or a caress did not come lightly—it meant a great deal, even more than his word.

He hesitated a moment. He believed she would not resent a kiss—and yet, would she? Maybe it was merely her friendliness—and there was no doubt but he wanted to take her in his arms; —and yet—could he mean what that would mean?

"You are a nice girl," he said slowly, "and awfully interesting."

He paused.

"You are going to be a very rich man, Mr. Hill Billy."

"And you'll be rich, too," he said.

"If I am, I'll owe it to you," she said. And were there tears in her eyes? The lashes were down.

"You'll come back if I need you?" Lafe's hands slipped from her shouldrs, and she stepped back.

"Oh, always!" And, without looking at him again, she slipped from the office.

Lafe sat at his desk for a long time

after Miss Hassler was gone—until twilight blurred even the wall before him. He was trying to be sure of things.

"I don't care," he said deliberately, as he got up and closed the desk, "if Nina does marry Alfred Walters." And then very irrelevantly a quotation from the Bible bobbed up in his mind: "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God."

Lafe stayed a week longer to receive and store a third shipment of the machines. Then he went back to Wahoo City.

Nina Wingate greeted him with perfect friendliness. But somehow the spring did not dance in her eyes as it did last year, and she looked as if the store had been giving her a good deal of trouble. He had been drawing on it pretty heavily to finish his contracts with Hassler and pay his cowpea-sowing campaign expenses. He had spent every dollar of available funds and drawn on the store for seven or eight hundred dollars. And he had another thousand to raise in June.

"Anything been happening?" Lafe had finished looking over the accounts and turned to Nina, with an effort at his old cordial comradeship.

"N-o," nothing of importance, I guess," she answered a little absently. The two other clerks were gone. It was after closing time. She was sitting on a stool by the counter near the desk—and looked rather tired.

"Oh, yes," she said, as though just remembering, "there was a stranger in town the first of the week—an odd-looking fellow, with black beard and white eyebrows. I heard he was getting the farmers to sign contracts to sow cowpeas. Mr. Birkins took him around—and I think he left Mr. Birkins to get the contracts for this county.

"And I hear"—she spoke self-consciously, in an effort to be casual—"that Mr. Walters is helping, too. Mr. Walters went off with him in his automobile, and was gone two or three days."

Jason was grinning.

"Lafe"—Nina gave a startled jump—"Lafe, that is not your cowpea concern, is it?" He had not told Nina any of his affairs since their disagreement.

Lafe broke into a hearty laugh—a laugh she had never heard but twice before.

"This is the richest thing that ever happened," he said gleefully. "My old enemies are working for me, and not knowing it. The man with the black beard and white eyebrows is Burke Moore, of Attler," he explained. "He's the richest farmer in this part of the State. He has taken the job of getting contracts for the planting of at least ten thousand acres of cowpeas. I am to pick them and thresh them for one-third the crop.

"That will mean, Nina"—in his enthusiasm he forgot there was an alien ditch between them—"that one man with one of my machines can gather ten acres a day—which will make me at least forty dollars a day for my third. You see ten thousand acres at that average will give me forty thousand dollars. I feel perfectly sure, no matter how the season is, that I'll clear twenty-five thousand dollars on this one crop."

"I hope so, Lafe." She was fighting hard to keep the voice steady and her eyes dry. "But—it looks—do you think it's all right for Mr. Birkins—and others to be into it?"

"Why, there is the joke." Lafe laughed again. "They don't know I have anything to do with it—Moore is signing up those contracts for himself. I deal only with him. He is to buy all these pea fields—and I merely gather and thresh for him."

"But"—Nina was struggling hard to

get in the spirit of his confidence—"but do you think—with Birkins and them in it—it is absolutely safe?"

"Absolutely," Lafe answered, with triumph. "I have the sole and entire right to make, sell, and use this machine in the south half of the State. They could not wriggle out from under my thumb if they were as small as a peppergrass seed. I absolutely have them."

He struck the desk a triumphant whack, and felt as safe from falling as a man lying in the middle of a prairie flat on his back.

IX.

The hill billy was too restless to interest himself in the small affairs of the little store; and, anyway, he was not particularly needed. Nina was a very efficient little person, and was making more out of it than he had ever done. He went back to Springfield. But he did not send for Miss Hassler.

Lafe began to plan for next year, and the next. After this first big crop, and the farmers saw there was cash as well as fodder in peas, there would be a big increase in the acreage. Next year there would be twenty thousand acres in this part of the State—and then thirty, and then no limit. He could reduce the charge for picking and threshing as the yield increased, and still have a golden stream. In time he might lease the machines to the farmers—charge them ten dollars a day. He could put out a thousand machines like that—and have an income of twenty—fifty, seventy-five thousand a year, and still make money for the farmers.

It was a gorgeous outlook, and he shook himself to see if he was awake.

"And ten years ago I was glad to get six bits a day for cutting sprouts," he grinned to himself.

The summer passed quickly enough; but at best waiting was rather an ordeal for the hill billy. He had every dollar invested, and had mortgaged the store for a thousand. He was as sure of a rich reward in the fall as could be—and yet he'd be awfully relieved when the returns came in.

Early in August he began to engage men to operate his machines. He gathered intelligent, energetic young fellows, four or five at a time, and explained the machine and drilled them in its use. He used an open field south of town for these demonstrations.

"It is sure some machine," said Burt Collins, a bright young man who was in the first bunch. "The table that bunches the pods and drops them into the bag is the clever business. Anybody nearly could have thought up the forks that strip the vines—but that assembling table is sure a fine trick."

Burke Moore had signed up sixteen thousand acres—and had scoured the country for enough seed.

"I could have got twenty thousand acres if there had been seed to go round," he told Lafe. "But I had to pay three dollars a bushel for the last five thousand bushels, and even at that I could get no more."

The season had been fine, and Lafe took more than one long drive among the hills and looked on the thick, luxuriant vines found on almost every farm. This was not only money to him, but good for the soil and food for stock and wealth for the needy hill farmers. And while Lafe's first thought was usually for himself, a second one followed it close—and it was always for the other fellow.

Hassler had sent four hundred machines by June. Lafe would not need that many this year, but as he had advanced the full ten thousand, he wanted all the machines made and shipped.

Nannie Hassler had written that her father was short of funds and awfully pushed with work, and asked if he could not wait a month or two for the

last hundred. He had cheerfully agreed.

On the tenth of August he received notice from the freight office that the other machines had arrived.

He went down to pay the freight and get the freight bill. The clerk, who had come to know the hill billy well, remarked, as he ran through the stack of freight bills to find Jason's:

"There seems to be a bull market for pea pickers this summer. Burke Moore's got in a pile of them this morning."

"Burke Moore?" Lafe questioned, with quick uneasiness.

"Yep," the clerk nodded. "Here you are—freight's one hundred and seventy-five." He passed over the bill for Lafe to sign.

"Where's Moore's machines from?" Jason asked casually, as he wrote a check for the freight.

"Memphis," said the clerk, referring to the other bill. "He's got about four cars of them on the track."

"Are these the first he has got?" Jason asked, as he signed the freight bill.

"No," answered the clerk. "He's been getting two or three cars at a time for three or four weeks."

Lafe slipped the freight bill in his pocket and went direct to Dixon's garage.

"I want a good car and a driver—and I'm in a hurry."

The car was forthcoming immediately.

"Get out to Burke Moore's as quick as the law allows," the hill billy directed the driver, as he got into the back seat.

It looked ugly—and Lafe kept remembering things that added to his suspicions. Moore had acted peculiar for some time. He had been away almost every time Lafe had gone out; and the time or two that he had caught him at home, Moore seemed abrupt and disturbed.

As the car turned from the road that skirted the woods into the long, smooth lane that led to Moore's place, Lafe saw smoke arising from the lot near the barn and several men hurrying about. As he came near he saw there was a long, improvised work shed, from which came the sound of hammers.

The hill billy left the car in the big road by the outer gate, climbed the fence, and cut across the lot to where the men were at work. There were a dozen of them in the open busily at work, and others busy in the sheds, where fires glowed in four forges.

Lafe felt a smothering, sweltering sensation in the chest. He moistened his lips and quickened his steps.

They were putting together pea pickers. There were already a score or more lined up along the lot fence.

"Where is Moore?" he asked of the first man he came to.

"He's gone to town," answered the fellow who was fitting a bolt.

Lafe's fear began to vanish when he took a second look at the machine the men were setting up. Since going into this thing he had studied every invention and device he could find that had ever been used for picking peas. This was the old Wadler machine that had sold pretty well fifteen years ago for one season, but proved an utter failure at picking time. He saw the machines were nearly all old and rusted—evidently had been standing somewhere during all the years since the bottom had dropped out of their sale. No doubt Moore had bought them for a song. Their failure was the defect in the table device for assembling and bagging the pods. This device spilled half the peas, and utterly failed to perform regularly.

Lafe sauntered around, watching the men work. He breathed easier. It was all a bluff. He even smiled. He

had never exactly trusted Moore; that is, he never had felt that Moore would sacrifice a steer to fulfill his promise to furnish a hide. But he had felt perfect security in his monopoly of the machine.

And he still had it. This thing would not work. Moore was merely planning a bluff to try to force better terms out of him. Well, he would not get them.

He turned to start back to the automobile, but went aside to see what the smiths in the sheds were mending about the machine. At the far end of the shed he came upon a rick of crated parts higher than his head. He stopped curiously to examine them. Again came that smothering sensation, and a cold, clammy feeling ran under the August sweat that stood out on his forehead.

They were assembling tables from the Hassler machine.

X.

Lafe put out his hand against the pile of crates to steady himself. He felt dizzy, a sensation of falling, as though the man who lay on his back in the middle of the prairie felt the earth vanish from under him.

And then, looking dazedly across the fields, he saw a horseman gallop up the lane and turn in at the big gate. The rider sat straight as a cavalryman, and had black beard and white eyebrows. Burke Moore threw bridle rein over a hitching post and came straight toward the lot. If he was surprised to see the hill billy, he gave no sign.

"Hello, Jason!" He gave a curt nod and started to pass into the sheds where the smiths were at work.

The hill billy roused himself. His muscles grew taut and alert as when he jumped a deer in the woods. His blue eyes darkened to a milky gray.

"Say!" There was an order to halt in the tone, and Moore stopped and turned annoyedly.

"What is it, Jason? I'm in a hurry."

"What about this?" The hill billy took three steps to meet him, and Moore stood still.

"What?" Moore looked impatient, but his eyes evaded Lafe's.

"These machines." Lafe waved at the lot.

"Nothing," said Moore shortly, "except I concluded it would be cheaper for me to buy machines than pay your price for picking."

"But what about our agreement?" Lafe's tone was under perfect control; even sounded a little lazy.

"We haven't any." Moore pushed the bristly beard back from his mouth, showing the sort of grin which comes to bloodily greedy men when they have their victim tied and gagged. "The only agreement," Moore continued, "is yours. You agreed to pick and thresh for a third. But I didn't give you any agreement to let you do it for that."

Most of us at some time have left a screw unturned, a buckle unfastened, a paper unsigned, an agreement unwritten which we knew ought to be done, but at the time we were a little tired or reluctant or timid, and felt it would be all right anyway. Then when an appalling accident happens, or total failure comes, we remember that a stroke of the pen or a moment's effort would have saved it all.

Is there anything makes a man sicker than that?

It had occurred to Lafe at the time that he ought to get a signed agreement from Moore to carry out his part of the contract. But he'd thought: "Oh, what is the use? I've got the machines—and he couldn't get out of it if he wanted to."

Now in that one moment he saw go glimmering every dollar he had and the fortune he intended to make—all because he'd been reluctant for a mo-

ment to ask for a half dozen lines of signed agreement.

Lafe's mind sprang up in an instant from the pit of sick humiliation to which it had dropped.

"But you can't use these." The thought stood up before him like a tree to a hard-pressed squirrel. "These tables are part of my patent—you can't use them, of course." His confidence was returning.

Moore merely grinned, a pitying but triumphant grin. "I guess you'll discover I can use them." He started to go on.

The hill billy's mind changed swiftly. He saw scarlet and purple and gray. His hands clenched as they had that day on which he had made Birkins a good patron of the doctors.

He started for Moore—and Moore, fighter as he was, backed a half dozen steps, hastily looking for a rock or club. But Lafe caught himself. That sort of thing would not help. He stopped and looked at Moore. "You low-down onery, lying cur." He turned toward the lane.

Lafe took the first train from Springfield for Kansas City.

"I guess I'm beat," he told himself as he got off the street car at Sheffield near Hassler's shop. He had told himself that fifty times coming up on the train. "And I know I'm a fool. But somebody's got to pay for this."

Old man Hassler greeted him very enthusiastically—a little too much so, thought Lafe. He was so very glad to see his young friend—the man who was helping him to make a fortune.

"Hassler," Lafe asked, "how is it that Burke Moore is buying parts of our machine?"

The old Swiss laughed the happy, triumphant laugh of the boy who has got another's hat and just keeps out of reach. That was a good joke, such a good joke! Four or five years ago there was a young man in a bank at Springfield who thought he was very smart. His name was Walters—yes, Alfred Walters. Hassler needed money terribly to work on his invention. He offered Mr. Walters just what he had offered Mr. Jason—one-half if he'd let him have money. Mr. Walters had turned up his nose at the invention. He'd thought it was no good. He had even refused a half interest for two thousand dollars. And now, after Mr. Jason had got it, this Mr. Walters saw what a foolish young man he had been; and came the other day—maybe a month ago—and gave him five thousand dollars in money, just for the right to use one part of the machine.

Lafe let him tell it in his own way, and his fears began to vanish. The old man in his simplicity had merely thought he had the right to sell them this table.

"But, Mr. Hassler," said Lafe, "you know I have the exclusive right to this machine in the south half of the State. You could not sell the right to use that part—or any part of the machine."

The old man ran his hands through his bushy hair and looked innocently puzzled. "They said I could, Mr. Jason. I hope it don't bother you any. They said it was all right—and I needed the money powerful bad."

"But how could it be all right?" Lafe took out his contract. "This gives me absolute and exclusive right to make, sell, or use your patent in these counties."

The old man rumpled his hair.

"But they had a copy of the contract, Mr. Jason, and a lawyer came with them—a Mr. Duncan. He says it is this way: Your contract is for the machines called the Hassler pea picker and thresher patented in 1909. That was my old machine—my first one. This table to gather the peas into the bag I invented two years later. It was patented by itself in 1911."

Lafe looked at his contract—the con-

tract drawn by the lawyer called in by Nannie Hassler—and so it was.

He slowly folded his contract and put it back into his pocket. He looked at the old man scrutinizingly—the guileless, friendly, eager old inventor—and said one word:

"Fool!" He said it in the deep disgust and humiliation—and he did not mean it for Hassler.

"Where is your daughter?" he asked Hassler shortly.

The old man hung his head. The sweat came out on his face, and he ran a soiled hand across his forehead.

"She wasn't my daughter—she's gone. This Walters, when I tried to get money from him for my machine, said he knew a girl, a mighty nice girl, who could sell it for me for two thousand dollars. She says she must represent herself my daughter and tell how poor we are; then people buy quickly. I thought it not very wrong."

The old man was manifestly in distress. Only an honest man could sweat like that.

Lafe went back to Springfield and spent two days facing things to see what was left. There was very little, so far as he could see.

Of course he had five hundred machines on hand. But what of it, except a forty-dollar-a-month storage bill? Burke Moore had signed contracts for practically every field of cowpeas in the south part of the State. Lafe could not even sell machines, for the farmers had sold their peas. There were certainly no returns in sight for this year. And not much for any year, for the old machines with the new device could be bought for less than half what he had paid for his.

And in his mail were three heavy bills from wholesale houses forwarded him from Wahoo City. He had drawn money from the store that ought to have gone to pay the bills, to the amount of fifteen hundred dollars—and that was all in this infernal patent business.

The bills had been put off twice, and were now beyond the polite "Please remit" stage. The "please" was absent. Lafe had less than a hundred dollars, and debts in Springfield amounting to twice that.

The boarders noticed at supper that something had gone dreadfully wrong with the hill billy; and they were uneasy, for they liked him. Everybody liked Lafe except his enemies; and his enemies were always people who had wanted what they ought not to have—and failed to get it.

Although it was August, Lafe went directly from the supper table up to his room and shut the door. When sick or in trouble he always wanted to be alone.

He did not turn on the light, for as twilight came he was past the figuring stage. He had figured it all out to a dismal conclusion. He was ruined. His enemies at last had turned the trick, and the bright star of his fortune had gone glimmering into blackness like an exploded meteor.

There were two windows in his room. Both were up. He sat on the floor and leaned out of the west one—looking gloomily into the night. Far off down the Frisco track came the distant whistle of an engine, the most lonesome night sound on earth.

Three days ago he had planned what he would do with his first hundred thousand dollars. To-night—how could he pay his last two hundred?

"Oh, shucks!" He gritted his teeth and tried to shake it off. But worst of all kept coming a picture of Birkins and Ames and Hilman and Walters in the back room of the Big Brick Store, giving for the fiftieth time the most gustful story of their lives—of just how they had done him. And with them he thought of Nannie Hassler.

"Fool! Fool!" came again from the

sorest spot of regret in his life. Then he thought of Alfred Walters—the yellow, the superficial, the unctuous fraud—marrying Nina Wingate.

His throat grew very dry and felt swollen, his eyes burned like hot cinders were in them, and his head dropped forward on the window sill.

There was a knock on his door—a timid, questioning knock. He did not stir, nor answer. He did not want to be disturbed.

Again the knock. But he gave no heed. Then the door opened ever so slightly, and a girl's voice called:

"Mr. Jason, are you here?"

XI.

Burke Moore's long, low, yellow roadster chugged up Main Street of Wahoo City at four in the afternoon and stopped in front of the Big Brick Store.

Moore and the proprietor, Samuel T. Birkins, went into the back room, where the oil and molasses barrels and coils of rope and trace chains and salt meat were kept. At Moore's story Birkins broke into a laugh that made the clerks clear at the front of the store stop and look at each other significantly.

Fifteen minutes later, when they came out, Birkins was smoothing his black mustache and drying his lips, and Moore put his hand to his back to see if his coat tail had properly dropped over his hip pocket. The automobile chugged on; and Birkins took his hat and went up the street like a boy who has a dog tied in the lot and is going uptown for a tin can. Hilman's store faced the east, and Ben was on the platform, whittling on the bench by the door. Business on an August afternoon was mighty dull in Wahoo City, and the storekeepers who had shade got outside to keep cool and see what was going on. Wahoo City was so small and deadly dull no one could afford to miss anything. Birkins gave his glum fellow sixty-nine-per-center an airy wave of the hand—and called greedily: "Come over, Ben, after supper. I got something rich to tell you."

He also passed the word to Horatio Ames, who, even when the thermometer had batted the hundred mark into the center field, wore his coat that he might have a buttonhole to hold a jaunty flower. And then Birkins went to the bank, called Alfred Walters to the back room, and both had a laugh so unnaturally violent that a casual customer in the front of the bank looked startled, and wondered if it was safe to leave money there.

The four gathered that evening after closing time in Birkins' back room, around the barrels and rope and boxes. Only Birkins and Walters were financially interested in this deal; but Hilman and Ames, being former fellow conspirators and fellow sufferers, had a right to share this rare bit of news. Birkins, pulling appreciatively his black mustache, gesturing with his right hand, told in a reserved way—just as he did when leading up to the point of a particularly vulgar story—how the possibilities had been discovered, how the plot was laid, and the trap set.

"And fellows"—he could not keep back the gloating any longer, but slapped both legs with his hands—"he not only walked right into it, but helped set the trap."

Then Alfred Walters told, with exuberant self-satisfaction purpling his round, pink face, his part of the game; and Birkins chipped in here and there—until they were all hilarious.

Ames nodded wisely, with that pious I-wish-you-well air that helped him sell shoddy goods to honest customers.

"I think," he said, putting his thumb and finger on the stem of the wilted flower in his buttonhole, "that it will really do the young man good. To be

broke isn't very pleasant at the time, but it'll teach him to be more conservative—and more respectful of the opinions of men older in business."

But Ben Hilman, who made no bones of either his hate or his greed, and who felt the ranklings of his former defeats at the wits of the hill billy, profanely and sulphurously voiced his delight. He was not only glad the infernal hill billy would be busted flat, but he hoped he'd die in the poorhouse; and if he happened to be on the county court at the time, he'd see the rations were cut down to bread and water.

Alfred Walters said he was particularly glad because—it not only made a nice pile of money for him and Birkins and Moore, but it would be a good thing for the town. The hill billy had been a great detriment—any man that tried to upset business methods always was.

And Birkins, who hated Lafe Jason worst of all, implied that it would be one step toward revenge to see the blasted animal bankrupt; yet there was a personal score yet to be settled, alluding of course to that incident, which had never been squared with his admirers, when the hill billy jumped the counter and left Birkins in the hands of his friends—the doctors.

Of course the story was too good to keep. It got out next morning and spread like the news of the elopement of the church tenor with a grass widow.

The usual driftwood of incompetents and loafers about a small town who never got farther than the front gate of success—and not that far, unless coaxed by a shaded bench and free whittling material beside the gate, can forgive and admire a man who goes clear away, and, after twenty years of hard toil, is "lucky" enough to be "well heeled." This sort of success can be attributed to mysterious fortune and inscrutable fate. But the fellow who comes among them with, say, thirty-six dollars, and, right under their noses, makes ten or fifteen thousand in three years, he is a living reproach unto them, and they can't any more get over it than a garter snake can a bullfrog.

The minute a fellow of their own blood in their own town finds a softer nail keg than the one they sit on, that minute they turn their jawbones into hammers and their noses into pruning hooks.

When the Amalgamated Association of Smut Listeners had the glad tidings next morning that Lafe Jason was "busted" flat, they rose up with glee and passed it on with increase. The only thing these fellows ever multiply is evil reports and patches on the seat of their pants; but they are strong on that sort of increase.

The report reached Nina Wingate early in the afternoon. It was brought by a spectacled, sharp-chinned, Mother-hubbarded blood relative of the other old-lady gossips who wore trousers and smoked pipes on the shady side of the stores. She came in and asked to see some calico.

"I reckon," she said, pecking at it with her sharp fingers, and chewing it to see if it would fade, "that you'll sell things for most nothing now that you're going to shut up."

"Shut up?" Nina asked, surprised.

"Why, lawsey, ain't you heerd the news?"

"What news?"

"Why, that Lafe Jason has failed. They say he's plumb broke up. He ain't got a dollar, and may have to go to jail. They say the store'll go, and everything. It was something about a patent. He thought he was smarter than he be. And some say he committed suicide last night, but I reckon that ain't so or we'd heerd it."

She did not buy the calico, and, as Nina turned away from her, the other girl saw the color was gone from her

face, her lips shut close, and a look in her eyes the assistant had never seen there before.

Nina went direct to the telephone and called the Farmers' Bank. And the other girl heard her say:

"Is this you, Mr. Walters? This is Miss Wingate. I'll not go to the ice-cream social to-night." A moment's listening, and then she cut in: "Merely because I don't care to." And she hung up the receiver.

Nina went to the back of the store and pinned on her hat. "Molly," she said to the assistant, "you close up at quitting time—and you and Jim look after the store to-morrow."

Nina went to her boarding house. An hour later she came out dressed for traveling—all but a slight trace of tears obliterated. She went direct to the depot, bought a ticket for Springfield, and boarded the five-o'clock train.

XII.

Lafe jumped up from the window and turned toward the door, as though a ghost had entered.

"Nina!"

"Lafe!" She came quickly across the room and held out her hand.

He took it, and held on to it. There was a choking sensation in his throat—and he felt afraid of his voice, so he said nothing.

"I just heard this afternoon," she said.

"Have a chair, Nina." He broke the tension which is always hard for a man to stand. He started to turn on the light.

"Don't, please."

He did not, but took a chair on the other side of the window. They were barely visible to each other in the dim light. After the first rush of gladness at seeing her came a reactionary dread of "I told you so."

He felt guilty, not only of inexcusable negligence in the business, but because of his resentment toward Nina. Nothing cuts a man more than for one woman to see that another woman has fooled him.

She waited in the shadow for him to speak—to make it easier for her to say what she had come to say. But he was still silent.

"Lafe," she said, "it isn't as bad as it seems now. Nothing ever is. You can make it back. You can always make it back. You have wonderful ability—and always find a way out. I've saved up seven hundred dollars—I want you to take that for a start."

"Nina—don't!" It was almost a groan. He put his head in his hands. Directly he lifted his head and laughed. He got up and turned on the light. The old courage was in his face, the whimsical smile at the corners of his mouth.

"Nina," he said, in a natural tone—and instinctively she looked at the top of his head and saw that unruly wisp of hair standing out in its old, boyish wildness—"Nina, you are a trump. But I can't take your money, not even borrow. You've worked too hard for it, little partner." Warm blood came to her face. It was the first time he had used that term for many months. "But I'll tell you what we'll do. As you say, no matter how far one gets off the track, there is always a way back. You take that seven hundred, and if you think you can pull the store through on it——"

"Oh, I'm sure I can," she said, with hasty encouragement. "We only owe sixteen hundred, and with this I can get time on the rest."

"Well, you take it and pull the store through—and a full half interest is yours."

"Thank you." She knew that was the way he must pay his debt. And wise is a woman who lets a man pay his debt in his way. "But what will you do, Lafe?"

"Oh"—he arose, and there were no marks of being crushed about him—"I'll go out and hunt for the way back." He stood looking down at her. The brown hair came softly across the corners of her forehead, the eyes that never lied were looking up at him with a great gladness—gladness for his courage and faith in his resourcefulness.

"Nina," he suggested, a little awkwardly, "I think you better go back on the ten-o'clock train. There's a few old hens at Wahoo City who never miss a chance to shake the dust off their own soiled feathers upon any innocent chick that stays out of the coop more than eight hours. It is nearly train time."

Nina arose, blushing. "I hadn't thought of that——"

He went with her to the depot, found a seat for her on the train, and stood talking by her chair until the bell rang. He felt deeply her loyalty and friendship, but there had been no personal word, nothing but of business affairs. There was something between them yet. Perhaps she knew what was on his mind better than he. As the train started to move, he turned to leave the car.

"Lafe." It was a faint, half-scared call.

He turned quickly, and leaned forward to hear what she wanted to say.

It came quite low, but emphatic:

"I hate Alfred Walters!"

He was already started for the door when he looked back over his shoulder, with a quizzical smile:

"So do I."

Lafe did not return to Wahoo City; and he disappeared from his boarding house at Springfield. August passed, and the first weeks of September, and nothing was heard of him.

Burke Moore's machines were ready; his well-organized force of operators took to the fields, gathering cowpeas. The old machine, with the Hassler addition, worked very well.

Moore and Birkins and Walters rode much through the hills, watching, with greedy satisfaction, the great stacks of pea pods at the ends of the fields where the threshing was done. A regular wheat thresher was used. The crop was fine, the yield better than expected—and they gloated over the thought that Moore's fifteen thousand acres gave them a complete monopoly of cowpeas. What a price they would get for seed next year!

Still nothing was heard of the hill billy. Birkins and Hilman and Ames and Walters gloated over their great coup which had finally eliminated him forever.

"He'll never come back to face his creditors," said Ames.

"They say the girl has put her last dollar into the store," said Birkins, "and the wholesalers are going to close that up in a week or two." Then, with a sly wink: "If they don't—we can squelch that little institution at our leisure."

It was all clear sailing now. And they were happier than they had been for three years.

But the fellows on the nail kegs knew it was not his creditors that kept Lafe Jason away. He would never return because he could not stand to be guyed about his cowpea picker. "The Lafe Jason Cowpea Picker"—what a chance for jest! Oh, but it was rich!—a hill billy thinking he had sense enough to get away with a patent pea picker—fourteen thousand dollars sunk in no time!

And of course they were wiser in their surmise than the business gang. For to face a court of bankruptcy is a daffodil picnic compared to being tried and executed by the Village Joshers' Union.

Then one day, toward the middle of

October, Hamp Smith, the lazy, pox-marked liveryman, while haunting the depot platform for trade, saw Lafe Jason drop off the evening train.

"Hello," said Smith, "what's the price of cowpeas?"

"Two crowbaits to the bushel," answered Lafe.

"I reckon the fellers done you up brown," Smith said, with relish.

"I reckon they did," agreed Lafe.

Then Smith spread the news that the hill billy was back, dead busted, seedy, and plumb down at the heels; and that Lafe had told him he was going to try to get Uncle Daniel to take him in next year to crop on shares.

The next afternoon, while sitting on the counter of his store, looking out of the open door in a deep study, Lafe saw the usual crowd of stragglers returning from the depot. The five-o'clock train had just choo-chooed in and chuff-chuffed out. After the stragglers came a stranger—a young woman who walked straight, wore a veil, and carried a small hand satchel.

She went directly to the bank, and, although it was after hours, the door opened immediately to let her in, and closed after her.

After supper that evening Lafe had gone to his room to read—he was absorbed in a large, leather-bound book—when there was a light, quick tap on the door. He was sitting close to the window to catch the last light.

"Come in," he called, without rising.

The door opened. A young woman slipped in, closed the door behind her, and stood hesitant for a second; then threw back her veil.

It was Nannie Hassler.

XIII.

Lafe was not surprised. He had been almost sure the girl he saw with a veil that afternoon was Nannie Hassler. But standing with her back to the door, her hands still on the knob, she was white and breathing audibly.

"I had to see you to—to—tell you"—she caught her breath in a gasp—"I didn't intend you to lose—I didn't know about it until to-day."

"Sit down, Miss Hassler." His tone was neither bitter nor accusing, and he placed a chair for her. Perhaps the shy reverence the hill billy had felt from boyhood for all women made it impossible for him to hate any woman. He certainly felt no hate for this girl, whatever had been her motive.

She sat down, clasping and unclasping her hands, still breathing as one who had been driven to exhaustion by some compelling emotion.

"You were good to me"—her tone was low, but excited—"and then to think I brought this on you; made you lose everything, everything! I heard all about it to-day. How you are ruined, ruined, and almost committed—almost was in despair!

"I didn't intend it at all—it was the worry, Mr. Jason. I did lie to you, but I didn't mean it to hurt you. It was this way:

"I came to Springfield, selling a ledger—a bank ledger. I've been selling things four or five years. I suppose"—she smiled faintly—"that is why it didn't seem very bad for me to tell stories. I went to the bank where Mr. Walters was cashier. That was before he came here, you know. Well—— You know Mr. Walters, don't you?"

"Yes." The hill billy nodded.

"He was very friendly," went on the girl. "He took a great interest in me. I was having a pretty hard time. He said I was such a good salesman I ought to get something big. We went together a good deal—and were engaged—I—I"—she blushed—"I guess I loved him—I think I still do—in a way, although I know he has acted very badly.

"We corresponded all the time, and last spring a year ago he wrote me he had the big chance for me. He told me about Mr. Hassler's invention. Said it was a fine thing, and he wanted to buy it, but didn't dare do it, being in the bank. It was bad for a banker to take risks. But said he had a friend who had come into some money, and he was mighty anxious for him to get hold of it; but the friend was awfully cautious, and he did not dare suggest it himself. His name was Lafe Jason, and he had just gone to Springfield.

"I was at Kansas City, and I went to see Mr. Hassler at once. He offered me two thousand dollars if I would sell a half interest; and I made him let me pretend to be his daughter. I was convinced the machine was a good thing, or I wouldn't have tried to sell it to anybody. I went to Springfield and found you—and you know the rest." She was looking at him appealingly, distress in her face.

"Except," said Lafe dryly, "why the lawyer you called drew the contract so it covered only the old machine patented in 1909."

"That was purely my ignorance," said the girl. "I looked over the drawings Hassler gave me and saw 'patented 1909.' I thought that covered everything. I really, truly did."

She was looking at him with such appealing candor, such a plea to be believed, that Lafe wondered if, after all, she was innocent.

"But about the sale of that last patent—the device, to Moore and Walters and Birkins—how did that happen?"

She visibly shrank from that and bit her lip. Her eyes showed signs of tears.

"I guess it isn't worth while, Mr. Jason," she said. "I—you've been so good to me—I couldn't stand for you to think I was a traitor—but everything is against me—I don't blame you for thinking I'm thoroughly bad.

"That was wrong—it was the worst thing I did, persuading old man Hassler to do that. They gave me two thousand dollars to put it through, Mr. Jason. I did not know I was hurting you. I thought they couldn't make anything out of it—I see now."

She got up, turned toward the door, and then turned back to him, with outstretched hand. She looked very appealing, even pathetic—and very interesting.

"Won't you tell me good-by and forgive me?"

He arose and took her hand.

"Of course."

"You are so good—so kind," she said. And, with a swift movement, leaned forward and kissed him.

She opened the door and turned again, lingering in it just a moment.

"You are sure you forgive?" She was smiling rather pathetically.

"Of course," he repeated. Then remembering: "You said you and Walters were engaged once?"

"Yes—and he's broken it," she said. "I'm going to sue him for breach of promise—right away."

"Do you want to marry him?"

"Y-e-s, I suppose I do—I think I love him yet."

"Then don't sue him for breach of promise." Lafe smiled enigmatically. "Not for a while. I think you can have him in a few weeks."

Nina was at the store early the next morning, earlier than either of her assistants, and several times looked out of the side window up the street or went out on to the platform in front and glanced toward Lafe's boarding house. She hoped he would come down early, and he did.

"Lafe"—Nina's brown eyes seemed to hold some big news in leash—"I want to tell you something."

"All right, Nina. I guess when a fellow is broke no news can be very scary." He smiled at her as they went down the aisle to the desk at the back of the store. "Sit down." He motioned to the chair at the desk. "I'll sit on the counter."

She shook her head. "I don't want to sit down." She stood by the counter near him and picked at the corner of a pasteboard box full of odds and ends.

"Lafe"—the words came slow, but rapid—"I want to apologize. I was wrong about Nannie Hassler. She wasn't—wasn't a traitor. She was your friend all the time."

"Have you seen her?" Lafe was really surprised.

She nodded. "She came to see me last night."

"Did she tell you," asked Lafe judicially, "that she pretended to be old man Hassler's daughter, when she was not?"

Nina nodded and looked up, meeting Lafe's eyes squarely. "Yes, she told me the whole thing."

"And you believed it?"

"I did."

"After a person has lied to you once would you ever believe them?" he questioned.

She laughed. "Why, of course—when they were telling the truth. If one deception spoiled all belief, you'd have to have an affidavit from your watch every hour in the day because it ran down once."

"Nina, do you really believe the story she told you last night?"

"Certainly—I know it is so."

"How?" He was puzzled.

"Oh"—she gave a little helpless gesture with her hand—"one can't tell just why. But, Lafe, we don't believe anybody because of what they say—but because of what we believe they are, and why they are saying it."

Jason pondered this new turn of Nina's a moment. Somehow he had thought women were hard on each other—and oversuspicious. And here she was championing the other girl.

"Lafe"—again her eyes came up to his, and they were full of a big, deep gladness—"I've got some awfully good news for you. She got two thousand dollars from Mr. Hassler for selling that patent to you and two thousand more from—those men, for persuading him to sell them the right to the table invention. And now that she discovers she was used to injure you, she can't keep the money, of course. She left it with me to give to you. That will give you a splendid start, Lafe."

He looked at her speculatively for a moment.

"Nina, if you were me would you take that money?"

"Of course. She wants to make it right as far as she can. I certainly would give her the chance."

"Nina," he spoke thoughtfully, "will you do me a favor?"

"Yes." She did not make any reservations.

"Take the first train after Nannie Hassler, find her, and return that money. Tell her under no circumstances will I touch a cent of it—that she must use it, and not to worry about me."

Nina returned two days later, her mission performed.

After she had told the story of her trip, she seemed uneasy, as though something was in reserve.

"But, Lafe, I did one thing you may not like," she confessed.

"What was it?" He was smiling inside, a smile that did not break upon his serious face.

"I borrowed a thousand dollars of that money from Miss Hassler. I gave her my note for it at eight per cent." She looked up at him anxiously, fearing his disapproval. "Was that all right, Lafe?"

"Of course," he smiled. "Your note,

Nina, if you didn't have a dollar or the ghost of a job, would be worth just eight per cent more than cash."

"Thank you, Lafe." And she went to the front of the store to display some stock.

Thursday, the seventeenth of October, Lafe found in the afternoon mail a letter, addressed, in round, running hand that was familiar, to "The Lafe Jason Seed Company."

As he left the post office he tucked the other mail under his left arm and tore open his letter. It read:

DEAR SIR: We have just harvested the greatest cowpea crop ever known to Missouri, fifteen thousand acres, and will be able to supply you with choice, clean cowpea seed in any quantity from one bushel to a hundred thousand, at two dollars a bushel, F. O. B. Wahoo City. Respectfully,

MOORE, BIRKINS & WALTERS.
COWPEA SEED CO.

A laugh, a sardonic, tormenting, superior laugh, made him look up. On the steps of the bank stood Alfred Walters and Samuel T. Birkins, watching him.

XIV.

Lafe stopped a moment, letter in hand, and looked at Birkins and Walters, standing on the bank steps, laughing. He grinned slowly, a sure, grim sort of grin, and waved his right hand to them. The laugh went speedily out of their throats like the last gurgle of an emptying jug.

"Nina," asked Lafe, as he leaned against the counter, watching her tag some remnants of summer goods, "do you know why bad luck never comes singly?"

"No," she answered, marking a three-yard remnant at ten cents.

"It's because the durn thing's a coward. When a great, big, bull-necked, red-faced hulk of Bad Luck bumps into a fellow and keels him over, all the other little, nasty, piping, spindle-legged Bad Lucks in hearing distance think it is a safe time to jump in and kick loose the fellow's ribs and bloody his face and rub mud all over him.

"The only way to manage Bad Luck," concluded the hill billy, "is to buck him until he gets afraid of you. I gave Bad Luck such a scare a couple of years ago I don't think he'll ever get back; but there's three or four two-legged critters around here with gourd heads that have taken over his job. They'd be willing to let their grandmothers go barefooted and live on rubber and cod-liver oil for a year if they could only get me out of this little, dried-up wart on the face of the earth called Wahoo City.

"I think"—a grim grin came into his face again—"this time they have succeeded."

The hill billy went to Springfield that evening.

The next day an alert, black-eyed, leathery-skinned man called on Burke Moore, Alfred Walters, and Samuel T. Birkins, and introduced himself as the United States marshal.

There was something going on in Wahoo City for the next week. A blind man could have seen it, and a deaf man heard it. Something had stirred the gang like a war bulletin into the holiday camp of a company of militia. There were conference and consultation, arrival and departure of lawyers, sneers, sweat, and brimstone.

The gang had plenty of self-confidence, and had thought they were safe; but there were two things that curdled every batch of fresh assurance—recollections of the outcome of every previous conflict with the hill billy—and the name of his lawyer, Attorney Dawson, of Kansas City, was a name to conjure with. He was one of the very biggest lawyers in the State, and had the reputation of never taking any case that was not sound.

Ben Oakley, an oratorical young law-

yer of Springfield, sought the hill billy in the privacy of his room.

"I thought I'd come down, and we'd talk this thing over," he said.

"Go ahead," replied Lafe.

The lawyer did, but discovered after a half hour that the hill billy had done none of the talking. Instead, he sat with his feet propped up on the window sill, tipped back in his chair, his hands locked behind his head.

"You see," concluded Oakley lamely, but assuredly, "you haven't any grounds at all for a suit. But rather than have any hard feelings my clients would rather pay you a reasonable sum—say five hundred or even a thousand dollars."

Lafe made no reply.

"What do you think?" Oakley asked.

"That you are talking to the wrong man." Lafe did not stir.

"How is that?"

"Lawyers ought to talk to each other," replied the hill billy lazily. "Then if they bore each other, they are paid to stand it. If you really have got any ideas, go up to Kansas City and tell them to Dawson."

Oakley got up in a huff. He hadn't the remotest desire to come to grips with Dawson. Dawson was what scared all of them.

"Well, if you don't want to be reasonable—we'll show you a few things." He started for the door.

Lafe did not ask him to tarry nor suggest that he come back some other time. The young lawyer hung fire at the door a moment.

"Of course, you can do as you please, Mr. Jason——"

"Of course," said Lafe.

"But if I were a friend of yours, I'd advise you to settle—and settle quick, on any terms."

"But not being a friend of mine," the hill billy drawled, "I suppose you'd advise me to go ahead with the suit. Well, I reckon I like the advice of my enemies best. But—if your clients are real keen on a settlement—tell them personally to come to me."

They came two days later. Moore, Birkins, and Walters met the hill billy in his store after closing hours Thursday evening. The stuffing was already knocked out of Walters and Birkins. However, Moore was really a fighter. He opened in his abrupt, peremptory way:

"Jason, come out in the open. What's back of these suits? It looks to me like mere spite work. We beat you at your own game, and now you are sore."

The four were seated in a circle. Lafe turned to Moore and spoke in that impersonal, unimpassioned tone that sounded too final to be even questioned:

"No, Moore, you did not beat me at my own game. There was no game. There was a straight, honest enterprise, with a gentlemen's agreement between us. It fell down because the man at your end of it did not measure up to the standard.

"Here is exactly what is back of the suit: Even before you"—he was speaking to Moore—"got into this, these other fellows were lying awake at nights, going after their alleged brains with hammer and tongs, trying to shape up some sort of plan to ruin me.

"Our gallant bank cashier"—the hill billy directed his attention to Alfred Walters, whose eyes grew shifty—"thought he had a very clever idea. Old man Hassler offered to sell him a half interest in an invention worth a million dollars for two thousand. But friend Alfred's keen financial judgment thought it was a sure loser. So he induced the girl to whom he was, and *is*, engaged"—Alfred's pink face grew poppy-colored—"to become Hassler's agent and sell it to me for ten thousand dollars, being dead sure he'd bankrupt

me that way. But when I proved to Moore it was a go, and you saw I was in for a fortune, then the three of you hatched up a conspiracy to rob me of the profits I had already earned. The big thing in your scheme was to buy a bunch of rusty, old, discarded pea pickers at Memphis and bribe poor old Hassler into selling you the tabling device.

"It was a pretty clever scheme, and you thought you had me tied and gagged so you could pull my toe nails out at your leisure. But there was one hitch. If you ever noticed, fellows like you always leave a gap open somewhere like a hole into a rat trap: one that lets the other fellow in, but won't let you out. In this little deal of yours, although the old machines had been discarded fifteen years, you forgot that a patent right runs longer than that." He paused a moment, and added, with a taunting sort of smile:

"Since August twenty-fourth, I have had absolute and exclusive right to manufacture, sell, and use this machine in Missouri. It cost me four hundred dollars."

Lafe leaned forward and spoke with an unescapable force of quietness:

"Every day that you used each separate machine is a separate violation of my patent right."

All three knew what it meant to violate a patent right, and what it meant to get into the federal court—for a half dozen lawyers had told them that very plainly. There was a moment of uneasy silence, each of the three waiting for the other to make the first break for cover.

"Well, what do you want?" It was Birkins, the hater of the hill billy, but the lover of dollars, who spoke first.

"If we put up a thousand apiece, will that satisfy you?" Birkins knew better than to offer the hill billy five hundred dollars.

"You used a hundred machines approximately twenty days," Lafe spoke calculatingly. "I am merely asking in my suit for fifty dollars damages for each day that each machine violated my patent right—that makes exactly one hundred thousand, I believe."

There was another gasp of silence—a very uneasy gasp on their part.

"But what do you really expect?" Moore questioned, a little less peremptorily. "What will you take to settle out of court?"

Lafe sat thinking several minutes—or perhaps he was merely giving them time to think.

"You fellows deserve the thumbscrews. You need a lesson that will help you to be honest for at least three months. I'd really enjoy bleeding you until you look like a case of ague. But I have a fool, sneaking feeling that I don't want money that does not belong to me.

"Here is how I will settle: You harvested approximately fifteen thousand acres that averaged six bushels to the acre. There will be a big demand next year, and these peas will be worth two dollars a bushel on the market.

"Moore has the figures, and I'll go over them—I have some of my own. You may figure every dollar you paid the farmers for their acreage, every dollar you paid for help for harvesting, and for every two dollars of this expense you may reserve one bushel of peas.

"All the rest you are to deliver to me at their nearest shipping point."

There were three simultaneous gasps. Alfred Walters exclaimed:

"But what about our other expenses? The five thousand we paid old man Hassler and the two thousand we paid—other parties and the four thousand we paid for the old machines—and a lot more incidentals?"

Lafe leaned forward and looked witheringly into Alfred Walters' eyes—looked until the red purpled his

round, pink face, looked until he punctured every layer of smugness of his yellow, greedy soul.

"Walters," he said, with sarcastic weariness, "if you tried to steal the shoe off a mule's heel, you'd have gall enough to ask the owner of the mule to pay your doctor's bill. I have nothing whatever to do with you fellows' investments in machinery and patents. If you lose, tell your troubles to each other. You've still got what you paid for, haven't you?"

"But you won't let us use them in Missouri?" said Birkins.

"Certainly not."

"We might ship them back to Memphis and sell them," suggested Walters.

"Only," remarked Lafe, "Hassler controls all his patents outside the State, and you couldn't use the tabling device there."

"Why, that way," burst out Walters, who was really hard hit, "we'd lose over twelve thousand dollars—besides all our profits."

"Possibly." Lafe got up. "Excuse me now, but I must lock up. I have an engagement. You can let me know if you accept my terms. There won't be any others."

XV.

One advantage in never bluffing is that you never have to. A man who tells too much has to say it over three times before he gets people to listen, and five times before he gets them to believe.

Birkins, Moore, and Walters, as they stood, a disconsolate group, on the store platform while Jason locked up, knew well that the hill billy would never make but one proposition. They also knew, to the breaking of their hearts, that he had them where even an eel could not wriggle out.

They talked together in a low tone until Lafe was half a block up the street. Then they called him back.

"Would you accept a cash settlement instead of the peas?" Moore asked.

"No," answered Lafe. "That would be handier for me, but if I leave the whole crop in your hands you'll hold up the farmers on their seed. It is a habit with you. I am going to see that every man in this section gets his seed for two dollars a bushel."

They surrendered.

"We'll fix up the details in the morning," said Lafe. "I have an engagement."

The full moon was two hours high above the tree line on the hills to the east. A meadow lark, still unscared by the approach of November, sang blithely in the field at the edge of town. Lafe walked the street half in a dream; more amazed at his victory and what it meant than ever a dream could have foretold. It was a good world, a fine place to work and fight in—and a wonderful night. He stopped in at Scott's restaurant—the only business house in town where a light still burned at nine o'clock.

Nina Wingate was sitting on the south porch at Berry West's, where she boarded. The family was already in bed and the lights inside were out. But the night, the late October night, awoke that in her that precluded sleep—a restless, half sad, wholly happy yearning—the old dream of a golden ladder of success, with something at the top of it better than all the golden rungs that led up.

Some one was coming up the walk; some one swinging along with the freedom of strength, but the deliberateness of real enjoyment.

Her heart beat fast—as one who expects without reason, and unexpectedly finds her expectations fulfilled.

As the figure came near she heard the familiar crack and crunch of breaking peanut hulls, and saw him put his hands to his mouth.

Above the flutter of her heart arose a great, glad joy—Lafe had won some victory—some great good fortune had come to him—and how he deserved it!

Lafe came in through the gate as though still half in a dream. She saw his face as the strong moonlight fell on it—and saw that rare smile she had seen that day five years before when he stood over her by the spring.

"Good evening, Lafe."

"Good evening, Nina."

He took a seat beside her in the porch swing.

"They have succeeded at last, Nina," he remarked.

"Succeeded in what?"

"In getting me to leave. I'm going right soon. I've been wanting to a good while. A small town is all right, if its size isn't all there is of it. I've had a good fight in Wahoo City. Now I want to go somewhere and live a while."

Nina felt a circle of chill, unreasoning fear around her heart—a sudden sense of desolation—of dullness and loneliness. The shining ladder of success seemed to topple into the mud. For what would it be—with him gone?

"How is it they are going to make you leave?" she asked, with astonishment.

He laughed. "They are not. They have merely given me a boost in the way I want to go."

And he told her the story. As he told it, the joy in the victory increased, doubled, and multiplied, for in the dim reflection of the moonlight upon the secluded porch, her eyes shone up into his with eager zest at his account of victory. She had thought him bankrupt, and now suddenly he was rich.

"Fifty thousand in one year!" She drew a deep breath. "And you'll make more next. Why, Lafe, it's a fortune—a sudden big fortune!"

He laughed joyfully. "Yes, it will be.

"And, little partner"—his voice changed tone—all the fight left it, and the moonlight and meadow lark came back into it—"I couldn't have done it without you. If you hadn't trusted me so."

"That was easy," she said. "I knew you would succeed. But it was you trusting me that——"

"Nina," said Lafe, "I've trusted you so much that I didn't even think about trusting you. I just knew always. Little partner"—he put his hand out for hers, and she did not evade it—"you are the best partner a fellow ever had."

They sat silent for a moment.

"What are you going to do with all your money?" she asked.

"With part of it," he said, "I'm going to buy a very beautiful home in Springfield. Everything must be very nice indeed—for I've always wanted such a home."

"Are you going very soon?" she asked.

"Yes; I'm going to sell the store next week."

"The store? Why, I thought you gave me half of it?"

"I did—and you can have the other half of what it brings to buy furniture with." His hand held her hand closer. The old, boyish, hesitating shyness came over him. "Nina, I can't tell you—what I think of you—I guess you don't understand—what it is to be in love."

She lifted her face toward him, and her eyes shone even in the shadow.

"I guess I *do*."

Robert Welles Ritchie will have a rapid-fire novelette in the next issue: "The Great Cardinal Seal," being an unwritten page of Korean history when China and Japan were at war.

Shoulder Straps

By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Revolt," "The Tuba Trail," Etc.

The newspapers gave but brief space to the story of one brave detachment of troops that returned to its base battle-scarred and bloodstained. Correspondents at the front knew that there was an abounding shadow of mystery over its march, but they failed to fathom it. Here are the actual facts in the case.

SERGEANT NICHOLS never argues, for which may his memory live. State to him the most extravagantly mistaken proposition you can think of, such as that volunteer soldiers surpass the regulars, or that full-dress inspection is a good and useful thing, and should be encouraged, or that the German needle gun is superior to the New Springfield, and he will listen to you with an air of respectful attention that, if you don't know him, will almost make you think he agrees with you. And when he speaks, it will not be in definite contradiction of even these wild heresies. But from somewhere out of the pages of his full experience he will be apt presently to cull a fragment of life more convincing than any labored logic. As he did on the night when, being in a provocative mood, I attacked all the things by which and in which he moved, the virtue of Authority, the necessity of Discipline, the divinity of Power.

"I see," he said slowly, when I had quite finished. "And it would maybe surprise you to know how often I've gone over that same route myself. There's considerable human nature even in a sergeant in the marine corps, and the man that serves the most isn't always the one that thinks the least. But it's that same human nature that I go back to for my answer, and—— By the way, weren't you at Bayombang in oughty-three?"

"I believe so," I said. "Yes, I was. Why?"

"Do you remember the detachment that came up from Iloilo in June that year, the one that was about six days overtime?"

Instantly I knew I'd struck something. I did recall that detachment very distinctly. It had arrived, battle-scarred and bloodstained, and, more than that, with the abounding shadow of a mystery over its march. Circumstantial as was the men's account of the affair in which they had taken part, exciting enough in itself, one always felt a sense of incompleteness, as though the real essence of the story had been left out. And the official account, furnished by the lieutenant, seemed to suffer from the same lack. I answered Nichols quickly in the affirmative, and waited.

"Well, I think I'll tell you the real story of that detachment," he began thoughtfully. "There might be something in it for you. Yes, I think there is. For we were average men, all of

us, picked up from the Lord knows where; and we were recruits, so the service couldn't have changed our characters much. A little section of humanity, twenty-five in all. Keep that in mind." And he went on with his story:

We were average men, but we weren't an average military detachment; that is, our organization wasn't quite normal. If it had been, of course the thing couldn't have happened. Hatchel, for instance—there are few sergeants in the service like him, and, as you'll remember, he didn't stay a sergeant long. And Mysel wasn't long a private, for that matter. Men find their true level pretty quick when the walls between them are broken down; and there's an argument for your side of the question, if you like.

For two days, as I remember it, there wasn't anything out of the ordinary about our march, though, of course, to us gumboots it seemed pretty strenuous. It's true there was a trail, cut through by the cavalry the year before, but you know how long a trail lasts in the islands. And between the brake we had to force our way through, and the cliffs we had to climb, and the rivers we had to ford, to march the regulation distance per day was no joke. But Lieutenant Karmody held us to it, and our pride helped some, and we'd have reached Bayombang on time if we'd been left to do it. On the second night, though, the thing happened that knocked our schedule sky high.

It was morning before we discovered it. The two sentries had been relieved, and coffee made, and our shelter halves and accouterments made ready for slinging, and then we began to look around for our officers. It wasn't like Lieutenant Karmody to sleep through reveille. Finally Sergeant Hatchel went to his tent and scratched at the flap of it. We all watched him; at that moment we had nothing else to do. He scratched a second time, and then called the lieutenant's name. Finally, he pulled the flap aside, and looked in. And when he drew back, with a puzzled look, I walked past him and glanced in, too. The lieutenant's knapsack was there, and his blanket, thrown back as though he'd just unrolled himself from it, and all his accouterments except his belt and revolver—but there was no lieutenant.

"Umph!" grunted Hatchel. "Should think the shavetail would get enough hiking during the day. Where d'ye suppose he's gone?"

I was a recruit, you remember. No, Hatchel was no man for sergeant-in-charge, which, of course, he was, in the lieutenant's absence.

"Exploring, I guess," I answered.

But I remember, rooky though I was, thinking it hardly right that Hatchel should walk off whistling and presently sit down to his breakfast. It wasn't my put-in, though, so I followed his example, and so did the rest of the men. But Corporal Thorn, who was second senior noncom, spoke up.

"First time I ever heard," he said easily, "of a detachment in the field settling down to eat with its C. O. missing, and no attempt to find him."

"First time I ever heard that a second lieutenant was a babe-in-the-woods," replied Hatchel, grinning. "He knows where *we* are, don't he?"

Most of the men laughed at that. Of course, Hatchel, being so easy, was a favorite among them, while they thought Thorn duty-struck. But Mysel —you remember him, a tall, well-built fellow, with thoughtful ways and remarkably steady eyes, and more forehead than the regulations call for, and a mustache? . . . No, you're right, Mysel didn't have a mustache when he reached Bayombang. But he did when he left Iloilo. Well, Mysel didn't laugh.

"Who saw him last?" he asked.

"He visited my post about two," said one of the sentries.

"That's funny," said another. "I had the one-to-three watch myself, post number one, and he didn't visit me."

The words were fairly out before he realized what he'd said. For, of course, that meant Trouble. Karmody wouldn't visit one sentry and pass up the other. Somewhere between the two posts something had happened. A scared sort of silence settled down on the bunch of us, to be broken by Hatchel.

"I suppose we'd better sound recall, hadn't we?" he said.

At that I saw Mysel look at him meditativelike. But Hatchel's suggestion was enough order for the trumpeter, and he blared out the call. We were all on our feet by that time, forgetful for once of our rations. We waited a minute; there was no answer; and then we began to beat the shrubbery around the camp.

It didn't take us long to find why Karmody wasn't with us. The posts of the two sentries, taken together, had made a complete circle around the camp. Not ten feet outside this circle there was a place the length of a man's body where the underbrush was broken down, as though some one had fallen in it at full length. At one end of this space there were blotches of dried blood. A very plain trail, that looked as though it had been made by two, or maybe three, men led away from it. There were spatterings of blood along this trail for about ten feet; then they stopped, but the trail went on.

"Clubbed and carried away," said Thorn. "Malanaos—but their tribe is a hundred miles north. A hunting party, I suppose. Now why didn't they just kill him and leave him? . . . Well, anyway, we've got our work cut out for us."

"And yet," said Andresen, not to Thorn, however, but to the world in general, "there's nothing to cry about. He's only one man."

The remark really didn't mean anything. We privates had become used to hearing Andresen's ideas; we called him "The Red." I mention it only because Hatchel was standing within a foot of Andresen at the time, and said nothing. Thorn looked at Hatchel, and turned away.

"Well," said Hatchel, "I suppose we'd better finish breakfast, anyway."

We did that; but made mighty short work of it. I think most of us burned our throats with the coffee, gulping it down. Mighty anxious to be on the trail we were, excited and angry and more than a little worried, for, though we'd only known Lieutenant Karmody during the two days of the hike, already he'd shown himself to be a man, and we hated to think of him in the hands of those savages. But still, even then, there was something else in the atmosphere of that camp, something new and electric. I felt it myself, and I heard it in the voices and saw it in the eyes of the rest of the men. It was freedom, a loosening of bonds. From the moment we had discovered that Karmody was gone, we had felt the service discipline slip away from us. And it was good, good, even when we knew it our duty to go into the jungle and get back those bonds and clamp them again on our spirits.

Mysel suggested that the lieutenant's tent and accouterments be hidden in the brush until we came back to the trail again. That suggestion met with general approval, so Hatchel accepted it. The common will was his will from the first, and his popularity showed signs of going up several notches. True, Thorn went about with a black look; but what was to be expected of an old fogy with three hash marks? And when we started, single file, there was no lining up or counting off or right-dressing or left-facing or any other

military tommyrot—only Hatchel's "I reckon we'd better go now, boys." Very sensible it seemed to us, and time-saving.

The natives had left a plain trail for us. Straight north it led, with the dry brake crushed down under their feet at every step. After about a quarter of a mile we began to notice shoe tracks. That cheered us, showing that the lieutenant wasn't hurt so bad but he was able to walk; but at the same time it promised a long chase. And if any man of us had thoughts that the trail was a little *too* plain to be an honest one, he kept them to himself.

Noon came, and we were still hiking; night, and the trail still stretched ahead of us. Nothing much had happened during the day. We'd had our little disagreements, of course; some of the men had hiked too hard for the rest, so that the head of the column had to stop several times, and wait for the others. And Thorn had got the idea that some of us were emptying our canteens too fast, and bawled us out for it. Hatchel, however, had settled that, saying that it was our own lookout if we went dry, which, of course, it was; and that there were probably plenty of streams ahead, anyhow, wherein he happened to be right. Which line of argument had so disgusted Thorn that he muttered something, and then piped down for good, and put his oar in no more that day.

You see how it was, as ideal a condition as ever was dreamed. Authority had abdicated, and willingly, too; and we were twenty-five individuals each following our own sweet individual wills. In so far as we had a common purpose and a common trail, we kept together; but we sang while we walked, and straggled when it suited us; and the trumpeter, who was so much of a boy yet that his work was play to him, kept the jungle ringing with fake calls. He fooled us a couple of times, we starting to obey the calls from force of habit; but, of course, that soon wore off, and "Charge!" and "Retreat!" meant all the same to us.

Frankly, I liked it. If I'd stopped to think—but I didn't. It was a sort of spiritual drunkenness, I guess, the sudden draft of freedom going to our heads after the long dry spell in the garrison. It's true there were several men that the thing didn't seem to touch, at first. But that night something happened that demoralized them as well. All except Mysel, and on him, judging his action by the blue book, it had an even worse effect.

We had what was called the "bino squad." They were four old-timers, and it was said of them that they could smell a jug of their favorite beverage a mile away. However that might be, shortly after supper these four men stole out of camp. We'd sighted a rancheria to the left of the line of march a few miles back; I suppose that's where they went. When they returned, they had with them two scared natives and four jugs of bino, which they proceeded to take up a collection to pay for. And, since we all chipped in for the sake of comradeship, we all had to help drink the stuff for the sake of getting our money's worth.

Shortly after the hilarity started, I heard Mysel and another sober face talking. Mysel said something about a pack of children. "They'll be lucky if they ever see Iloilo again, or Bayombang, either," he went on. "And Hatchel—how in the name of the commandant did he get his stripes?"

"By being a good fellow," answered the other. "And he is the best-hearted fellow alive; but as for a noncom—well, they should have gone to Monolias for one and done with." Monolias being the place they used to send men who'd gone a bit off with the heat.

"He's not the only man here that could qualify for that ticket," said My-

sel. "But this state of affairs has one advantage. Every man's his own boss, and if I walk into the trap that I think is ahead of this crowd, I'll show myself as big a fool as the rest. And I'm not, quite."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll sleep on it;" said Mysel.

"Well, while I'm in the crazy ward, I think I'll do as the rest of the inmates do," said his companion. And came over and joined us around the jugs.

It appeared, though, that Mysel didn't wait to sleep over it, for when we turned out in the morning he was missing. It was a plain case of desertion, for his kit and accouterments and rations were gone with him.

What I'd heard him say set me to thinking a bit; and I've an idea that in the sober morning light things looked a little different to most of the men than they had the night before. But we'd started off wrong, and none of us wanted to be the first to suggest a change of course. What leadership we had was naturally that of the most reckless among us; and the nearer each one of us came to them in recklessness, the better we were thought of by the rest. So we went on in a way that probably not one single one of us would have thought of going if the decision had been put squarely up to himself. Which, come to consider it, is a circumstance that might bear some thought.

We finished the bino before we started, and, after we'd sung a few songs and passed a few jokes, the expedition took on more than ever the nature of a picnic. Of course, we hadn't forgotten our mission—there was poor Karmody ahead, and maybe a fight, but, never having been in a brush with the natives, we naturally despised them, and, anyway, what was the use of crossing the bridge before we got to the water?

Then we had some entertainment. Two of the men had got into an argument the night before—a question of marksmanship, I believe, or something equally vital—and it naturally came up again in the morning. One of them said something injudicious, and in a minute they were tangled. Thorn tried to stop it—it was his last attempt at authority—but the majority were in favor of letting it go on, and, of course, Hatchel sided with the majority, furnishing the perfectly good argument that it was better to have it over and done with. But if there had been any idea of discipline left in that detachment, it was ended by the time the fight was ended. The reins had been slipped, and even if Hatchel had thought of putting them on again, it's doubtful if he could have done it.

Of course, the thing was nuts to Andresen. He was some sort of philosopher or other, I disremember the name, and this was his idea of how the world should be run. Every man for himself, one as good as another, and union only when union came natural, as it did now. Oh, he'd pounded his theories on us for months—he was some talker—and see now how well they were working out. The only thing that troubled him was that this ideal state of affairs would naturally end with the completion of our mission. He had his followers, of course, and toward the last they formed a clique by themselves. I think there was some crazy scheme afoot—but I'm not sure, so I'll say nothing of it. He'd talked so much that he'd hypnotized himself as well as the others.

All that day we followed the trail. It was the easiest possible hiking, across a great, grassy plain, with nipa-built barrios scattered over it to our left and right, but never one directly along the line of march the natives had laid out for us. Here and there, though, there were coconut palms and mango trees, and these helped us out with our rations; and very often, far to our right,

we caught the bright green of rice fields. Half a dozen times we saw natives peeping out of clumps of shrubbery or hiding in the grass, watching us pass; but the most any of these ever did when they were discovered was to salute in a funny fashion and run away. From appearance, the country was peaceable enough, and we were as safe as though we were doing a practice march in Kansas.

By the morning of the third day, however, we saw there was something else ahead of us. Great brown-black mountains loomed up on the horizon; and between them and us there were ugly-looking hills and deep hollows; and I, for one, began to lose my lightheartedness. Maybe the rest did, too; but the bino squad had been busy again the night before, and our canteens were filled with courage. But still I couldn't help thinking that if it hadn't been for that same bino squad, and for various other interferences, we might have been up with our quarry by now, and returning. For water is the only drink to march on, after all, and the steady regulation gait the only pace.

I noticed Thorn kept studying the hills ahead. A worried look came into his eyes now and then; but then he'd clamp his jaws shut stubbornly and shrug his shoulders. Once, when he did this, I edged up to him and asked him if he knew what sort of country was ahead of us.

"Why don't you ask Hatchel?" he said.

"Hatchel's senior, but you've got the service stripes," I told him.

"I never expect to get another," he grunted.

"Why?"

"Because Hatchel's senior," he said, and dropped in behind me.

It was plain he wasn't going to interfere with the conduct of the detachment again, even if it came to the point of saving it. He was wrong, of course; but he was only human; and I suppose there was a certain satisfaction in seeing us, who'd flouted both his orders and advice for the last three days, running blindly into danger for want of them. But I managed to persuade myself that all that ailed him was his grouch; and I screwed up my courage by whistling.

Oh, we were idiots. Forgetting everything else, what we discovered when we reached the broken land should have warned us that we were being baited like rats to a trap. For though on the plain it might have been hard for the natives to have hidden their tracks, here they could easily have done it. If they had crossed the bare, rocky top of just one of those hills, it would have taken us a day to find where they had come down on the other side. But instead, they kept to the valleys, wading through the brake like men through a field of ripened grain.

The order we were marching in would have disgraced a company of ditch diggers. Single file where the trail was hard, sometimes in couples, sometimes in groups of three or four. Whoever happened to be in front led us. Sometimes the fast hikers would beat it on ahead, and then sit down and wait until the rest came up. Sometimes others would lag behind. Soldiers we were, as we proved later; but just then we were a flock of sheep and without a bellwether.

The kid trumpeter came up to me. "I've read some stories of—the Indians," he said. "Wonder if these gugus are anything like them?"

"You ain't scared, are you, Jack?" I grinned.

He swore at me for that. But he finished by muttering something about "if the shavetail was back," meaning Lieutenant Karmody. That made the man marching next to me grumble. Here we were, twenty-three good men with rifles; and why should we need

one with a pea-shooter to tell us what to do? It was Lieutenant Karmody that needed us, not us him.

By noon we had got pretty well into the hills. After we had eaten we started on again, but not in as open order as before. The men that did straggle soon came back to their places again. I noticed that when they left the line, Thorn seemed to be struggling with himself, choking down his anger.

There were no cañons, just steep hills and crooked, narrow valleys. We couldn't see very far in any direction. Once I heard something behind that sounded like a man walking; but it was only for a moment, and no one else seemed to hear it. If it wasn't imagination, I told myself, it was a deer or carabao. Even if there were natives around, it was hardly probable that they'd be following us. We could look for them ahead.

So, in spite of our bravado, along toward nightfall we were every one of us tense and watchful, and in a mood when we were readier to act than to think. And that same mood, though it might seem the proper one for a soldier to have, was the one best fitted to destroy us.

The trap was set in a valley just suited to the gugus' purpose. It was not so narrow that we'd be overly suspicious of entering it, and not so wide but that they could extend their infernal contraption clear across the bottom of it. The sides of the broken hills that surrounded it were wooded, so as to furnish them shelter for the wind-up of the affair; and too steep for easy climbing. Seems like they would have had us at enough disadvantage if they had just hidden themselves, opened fire on us from an elevation of a hundred yards or more, and trusted to their marksmanship to bring us down before we could have scrambled up to where they were; but they wanted a surer thing than that. Besides, that would have been too much like white man's fighting. The method they used was the time-tried method of their ancestors.

Maybe it was the memory of the Indian stories he'd read that made the trumpeter so observant. Anyway, he was walking in advance, side by side with Hatchel. I was one of the next pair. All of a sudden the lad stopped short, staring ahead. "There's something moving—*there,*" he half whispered.

It showed the strain we were under when the sudden stoppage at the head of the column, instead of setting the men to shouting inquiries and impolitely worded orders to move on, brought us up tense and silent and—well, I pretty nearly said, afraid. For certainly, all day long, there'd been coming over that detachment, in spite of all we could do, a certain atmosphere of doubt that I never felt in the service before or since. Doubt—yes, that's the word. A sense of something wrong, some weakness, indefinable, but real as the air. Individually we were no cowards, as we were to prove; but the faces of us at that minute weren't faces that a captain would like to see behind him in a charge.

"I don't see anything," said Hatchel.

"I saw it," insisted the trumpeter. "Something black—plain as day—behind them bushes."

What bushes? The lad's words didn't mean much, as far as location went. Ahead of us, not a hundred yards away, clear across the valley, stretched a continuous line of shrubbery. It was too continuous and too straight to be natural; and I've an idea that the Malanaos would have taken greater pains with it if we hadn't shown them already that they could bank on our stupidity.

Naturally, with the head of the line stopped, and the rear coming on, we bunched. A fine target we made, and

if the Malanaos hadn't been in the habit of filing off the front sights of their rifles, so they could take better aim, and suchlike tricks of marksmanship, we'd have been drilled through and through. For the next instant they fired.

It was a ragged, scattering sort of volley, and some of the bullets purred as they passed, and some—the ones that had been dumdumed or loosened a bit, so they'd flatten in the air or come whirling—shrieked, as though the blood lust of the men that had shaped them to tear flesh had found its way into the lead. Thorn clapped his hand to his shoulder, a man behind me cried out, in a surprised sort of way, that he was hit; and the next instant something seemed to snap inside of me, and I found myself running with the rest—not double time, but at a sprint—straight toward the bushes that had spat death at me. And the pity of it was that this unreasoning, headlong rush, that some might think should have brought us victory, was the very thing the Malanaos had counted on to give us a worse death than that of the stinging bullet.

We had a sense of it. We were carried out of ourselves by the surprise; but not for a moment, if I judge the others by myself, did we feel quite sure of ourselves. We went on, each man carried forward by his own brute instinct to strike back, and by the forward urge of the others. But it was wrong—there was a lack in it—and the next instant, lucky for us, the lack was supplied.

"Detachment, *halt!*"

The Malanaos were firing, some of us were yelling; but that command rang out as clearly as it ever had on a parade ground. From somewhere behind us it came, and in a voice that I, at least, didn't recognize. It wasn't one of us, I knew that, and it wasn't Lieutenant Karmody. But of a sudden I found myself bracing back, trying to check my rush; and the next minute I was standing still, with my rifle at the position of ready, within fifty yards of the line of bushes. To right and left of me were the others, with their feet dug into the soft earth, so quickly had they checked themselves.

"Line of skirmishers, *prone!* Double time, *march!*"

How did we find our positions? I don't know. The next minute I was lying flat in the thick grass, and on each side of me, at three paces' interval, were the men that should be there, exactly as we'd rehearsed the drill a hundred times in the garison at Iloilo, and afterward on the march under Lieutenant Karmody.

"Advance by rushes. *March!*"

Up to then I'd been too busy to think. I was busy yet, loading and firing into the scrub ahead; but in the moment it took the number one men to rush forward and throw themselves down and begin to pepper the bushes to cover the advance of the number twos, a great deal happened in my own mind. I was amazed, of course, and curious, and some resentful—for what sort of a man was I, to be blindly obeying an order that came seemingly from nowhere?—but mostly it was relief I felt, and a certain sense of security that I wondered at, even then. It seemed to me we'd been saved, though from what, at that moment, I couldn't have given a guess. Then I was up and running, to drop down again at the regulation distance. This brought us almost within a rifle's length of the line of bushes that had hidden our enemies, but that had by now fallen silent as a graveyard.

What we in advance wanted to do was to fix bayonet and charge into that bramble and clean it of whatever remained. But we were no longer our own masters, or, it might be better to say, servants of our own impulses. We kept on firing, though there was

nothing to fire at but the landscape; and mentally resigned the job to the number one men, whose next charge would, of course, take them past us.

But the Voice decided it otherwise. *"Halt!"* rang out again, like a pistol shot, and then the command to close up. The men behind came trotting into their places. They dropped by our sides, panting; and had their rifles to their sholders on the instant. But the next moment the Voice snapped "Cease firing!" and a man in lieutenant's uniform, but wholly unarmed, stepped through our line from the rear, and forward into the brush.

Who was he? Well, I didn't know him, then. I thought I did, the first glance I got of him, as he passed us. But by the time he had turned again, and called to us to come on, I'd become doubtful. And a minute later, after we had pushed through the thin screen of bushes and discovered what he had saved us from, I had decided absolutely that I didn't.

Yes, it was a trap. Nature had no hand in the planting of those bushes, they were nothing but stalks and tree branches set in the ground; and behind them was the neatest and deadliest pitfall I ever saw, about ten feet deep, with poisoned bamboo stakes sticking up from the bottom like spikes. If we'd continued our first rush, the Malanaos, of course, falling back before us, by then we'd have been no better than so many spitted butterflies.

We crowded to its edge, staring down on it—and then a bullet, ripping into the earth near us, reminded us that the retreat of the natives had only been a trick, after all. A scattered popping sound from every point of the compass followed that first shot, and a humming like a hornet's nest as the bullets drove in upon us.

"Quick!" snapped the newcomer. "Get those bushes into the trench. And look out for the wounded."

It was a marvel, the way the men jumped to obey him. No panic, no fright, one might almost say no haste, just quiet, quick, efficient action. In much less than a minute the bamboo spikes were covered with four feet of loose foliage, and we were lying on top of it, as completely sheltered as a man could wish. Four of us got busy with first-aid packages; but we'd had the luck of saints. Not one of the men was so bad off that he was out of action, or like to be.

"Don't waste your ammunition, men. Hold your fire until you see a man clearly. And now—who's in charge?"

"I am, sir," said Hatchel.

"Where's your officer?"

"Captured, sir."

"Captured! How did it happen? Start at the beginning; give me the history of this detachment."

If Hatchel had any mind to ask him *his* history, it didn't show. And he didn't waste any words in telling ours. There was something in the manner of that young officer that seemed to brace him, like a splash of cold water.

"Humph!" grunted the lieutenant. "A pretty trap. Of course you were right to follow, but you should have known——" He stopped and considered a moment. Then, "Cease firing!"

The order was hardly necessary; none of us were firing. There was nothing to fire at but brown rocks and green bushes. As soon as we'd taken to the trench, the Malanaos had taken to shelter and a waiting game. Thorn, who'd come back to his own again, whispered among us their probable plan. The whole valley was already in shadow; there weren't fifteen minutes of daylight left; and the beginning of night meant the beginning of a rush, and very likely the end of us. For a Malanao with a bolo in the dark is as deadly a bit of fighting machinery as was ever invented; and they outnumbered us at least four to one.

We might have been in something of a panic if we hadn't been so busy wondering how the mysterious officer was going to get us out of it. For, of course, it was up to him, and the unhesitating way in which he assumed the responsibility made us trust him, in spite of our reason, to do it. But to save myself I couldn't see any sense in his next move.

"Load!" he commanded. "Give me your rifles, five of them. Put them down here." He pointed to the ground at his right side. "And—be still. I'm going to try something—it's a chance."

He picked up the first rifle and began to fire deliberately into the air. He fired twice, then waited about three seconds, then a single shot, and then twice more in rapid succession. There was a longer pause, and he repeated the shots, with exactly the same intervals. I looked around puzzled; the others were staring at him blankly; and then I saw Thorn's face light up. That same instant I got the idea myself. He was calling Karmody in the wigwag code, only using the rifles instead of a flag—two, one, two; two, one, two; *K, K, K,* over and over again.

"If he's alive, he should understand that," I heard him whisper to Thorn, who was lying next to him. And then he began to spell out, in his powder-and-shot alphabet, very slowly and carefully, "W-H-E-R-E." A heliograph couldn't have intervaled the signals more accurately.

He stopped and for the next minute we lay there with our nerves strung up, tense with listening. We knew it was a long chance. If Karmody was alive, he would hear, and if he was in his senses he would understand; but he would be bound and gagged, beyond a doubt, and as to his replying—— And just then, as if to give our thoughts the lie, he replied.

A great bang, four times repeated, like the clanging of a kettle cover on rock, came ringing clearly out of a cut in the hills due west from where we lay. Karmody, bound and watched though he was, had managed to work his hands into the handle of a metal shield and pound out the letter "H"—abbreviation for "Here"—before they pounced on him. Then all they did was to drag the shield away from him, and bind him more securely, for, of course, the sounds didn't mean anything to them. But——

"There's your officer," said our lieutenant signalman. "In five minutes it'll be dark enough to go get him. Keep under cover, and no firing."

So, while the dusk slowly settled, we lay there silent, knowing that just behind that dusk, creeping down from the hills, closing in in a slowly narrowing circle, were coming the Malanaos. Just so close they would creep, perhaps to fifty yards; and then there would sound a single yell, and then an inferno of them, and they would rush in and kill. Thorn, who'd suddenly become of some account again, whispered this much of their mode of warfare. But even he didn't quite see the way out, possibly because, like the rest of us, he was putting it up to the lieutenant. And presently, quite as coldly as though he were at maneuvers, the lieutenant gave his orders.

"Follow me," he said, "single file. Don't speak, don't whisper, keep *still.* Remember, everything depends on that. At first sight or sound of the enemy, drop to the ground noiselessly, and lie there until they pass. Then on again. Necessary commands will be passed from man to man, in a whisper. *Forward!*"

Again it was a chance, but it was our only chance, and we made it. And it wasn't quite so remarkable as it seems in the telling. The night was pitch black, and we met the Malanao line midway between the trench and the base of the hills. At that distance, there

being but a hundred or so of them, there were naturally big gaps between them. The lieutenant was leading; he heard them before they heard us, and, as his whisper of "Halt!" ran back along the line, we dropped into the grass like shadows. They couldn't see us, and, as it chanced, none of them stumbled over us, though one man, the only one I saw, passed so close to me that it was a temptation to reach out and trip him. Then they were behind us, and we were going on again; and we'd almost reached the cut from which Lieutenant Karmody had signaled, when the devil's own yelling, followed by a sudden silence, told us that they'd charged the pit and found it empty.

By that time we were running at a careful double; but as we entered the cut, the lieutenant passed another order, and we changed our pace to a slow walk. We crept on tiptoe like red Indians, for now there was a searching foe in the rear, and, we hoped, an unsuspecting foe and prisoner in advance. The cut narrowed; we crept still slower; and then just the faintest whispered halt passed from man to man, and we at the rear knew that the head of the line had come upon Karmody and his guard.

That was one part of it I didn't see, but my ears served me about as well. There came the sound of three blows, so close together that they were almost one, followed by a sort of choking snarl, and a scramble, and another blow, and dead silence. "Close up!" came the command, and we obeyed, to form in a circle around Lieutenant Karmody and three Malanaos, lying almost in a heap on the ground. The three Malanaos were unconscious, and Lieutenant Karmody seemed to be fast becoming so. He was bleeding from a fresh bolo cut in the shoulder, given him by the one Malanao that it had taken two blows from a rifle butt to put out.

Two of the men were already busy with a tourniquet, while two others were cutting the bejuco lashings from the lieutenant's wrists and ankles. And the other lieutenant, the man that had saved us, was doing a strange thing. He had drawn himself up rigidly to attention—it was just light enough that I could see his outline—and saluted.

"I report four of the detachment wounded, sir, but all able to march," he said formally.

By his voice, Karmody was just holding on. "Who are you?" he asked. "Where's Hatchel?"

The other bent and whispered something to him very rapidly, and I saw Karmody, weak as he was, start.

"You!" he cried sharply. "Why, that's——" Then he seemed to grip himself, waited a moment, and when he spoke again his voice was hardly to be heard. "I'm—I think—I'm all in. You better—remain in charge."

"Very well, sir." Then the mystery in lieutenant's uniform became an officer again. "Blanket litter," he commanded sharply. "Quick, now. . . . Don't talk, there. Forward, march!"

In less than a minute we were on our way again, very careful and quiet, taking turns at the corners of the doubled blanket on which we carried Karmody. And it was while I was stumbling along under the weight of him that I heard a man behind me whisper:

"It's Mysel."

"Shut up," returned another. "Of course it is. Haven't you known it all along? But *I* want to get to Bayombang."

And so did we all—*we wanted to get to Bayombang*. And that was why we trudged along.

I interrupted Nichols. "Mysel! But he was a private."

"Sure he was, a private in lieutenant's uniform. In Lieutenant Karmody's uniform. You remember we left

Karmody's accouterments and knapsack hidden in the brake. Mysel deserted us, but to come back again."

"But the men couldn't have known that——"

"Didn't they? A shaved mustache makes so much difference! Well, maybe they didn't—and officially they never did. For the second evening of our return march—you'll notice we were hiking faster now, in spite of our load and wounds—we reached the point where we'd left the Bayombang trail. Some time that night our supernumerary officer disappeared, and our missing private returned; and if there was a man of us that spoke to another of the transformation, I didn't hear him. For impersonation of an officer is a serious offense, and so's desertion; and, besides, there'd been nothing so glorious in our conduct of the last five days that we cared overmuch to talk about it."

"But that doesn't prove——" I began.

"Nothing is proved," quoth Sergeant Nichols. "Not even that Mysel deserves the captain's bars that he's wearing on his shoulders to-day. I only know what happened."

Pearsall has written a number of army stories for the POPULAR. They are worth keeping. If you have not a complete file write us and we will supply the issues in which the Pearsall stories appeared.

THE BIGGEST DOSE OF RADIUM

JAMES C. GRAY, vice dean and professor of law in the University of Pittsburgh, holds the record for having had applied to himself more radium than has ever been brought to bear on any other human form. He was a sufferer from cancer, and, when surgeons failed to give him the relief he desired, he turned to radium.

Applications of radium are calculated in milligram hours, and there are two forms of it used, radium bromide and the pure radium element. Professor Gray has had applied to him 60,000 milligram hours of radium bromide, or 31,500 milligram hours of radium element. The most that any one ever had had before, according to the available statistics, was 20,000 milligram hours of the radium bromide.

HE WORKS AND HE DREAMS

CHARLES NAGEL, one of the leaders of the bar in St. Louis, also secretary of the department of commerce and labor in the Taft administration, makes his living by winning big lawsuits. As a matter of fact, however, this was not what he wanted to do when he was a young man. At that time his ardent ambition was to be a painter, a picturer of lovely faces and of beautiful scenes. The remnant of this desire is his present-day habit of carelessly drawing striking caricatures on his office pad of the big men of business who happen to be talking to him during the routine work of the day.

McHenry Weighs Anchor

By Holworthy Hall

Author of "Pepper," "The Ivory Hunters," Etc.

Any man can make money selling collar buttons. If you doubt it here is Pepper McHenry's great feat for your attention. It happens during the momentous discussion of "What shall we do after the four long years of college?" Pepper makes a bet that he will make six hundred dollars selling collar buttons within a month. Read the yarn and you'll see it *can* be done.

AFTER the matinée was over—the plot had concerned the squandering of a million dollars by a young man who thereby got a few additional millions from an eccentric uncle—McHenry and Sewall took their way across the Common toward the Esplanade.

"Pepper," said Sewall thoughtfully, "what would you do if you had as much as a million yourself?"

"Get a shine," said McHenry.

"No—seriously."

"Seriously?" repeated Pepper. "Impossible! I couldn't be serious if I had that much."

"Well, suppose we were just beating it along, as we are now, and a lawyer came up to us and told you one of your old reprobate ancestors had died in Hongkong and left you his wad. What *would* you do?"

"I'd stand right where I am and yell for a taxicab," said Pepper. "I'd drive out to Cambridge, and then I'd buy the machine and give it to the chauffeur for a tip. Then I'd get *you* a shine."

Sewall opened his mouth and closed it again in the irritated fashion of the majority of people who tried to pin McHenry down to facts.

"Money doesn't bother me much," continued Pepper. "I'm rather impartial, too, because I never have any."

"That's your fault. Your dad certainly sends you enough."

"No one man could ever send me *enough*, my dear young friend! He sends me about twice as much as he says he will, and that's about half what I want. As I said, money doesn't bother *me*. It's so blamed easy to get, if you know how. Take one of these six-best-seller authors, for instance—the lads who draw a quarter a word. He sits down and writes something like this: 'No,' she said, 'you can't kiss me—I'm insured!' Then he puts in a bill for two seventy-five! Or look at these real-estate sharks—all they do is to get options on some dump on a good street and sell it to widows and orphans. Or—or brokers. Say, *that's* a great business! They get you going and coming! It costs you money to buy stock, and it costs some more to sell it! I tell you, Ted, making money isn't anywhere nearly as hard as keeping it!"

"Speaking of that—decided what you'll do when you get through? Not much longer to wait, is there?"

"Murder, no!" said McHenry. "Two

This series of Harvard stories began in the first June POPULAR. Back numbers can be supplied.

more months! Why, I haven't decided exactly what I'll do."

"Really? I thought of course you'd go in with your father."

"So did I, but he's changed his mind. He says he thinks I ought to get some experience somewhere else first. Wants to be sure I'm not a loafer. I suppose that means I'll have to get a job in some joint on State Street at six a week and work my brains out."

"John Phillips says he's going to raise razor-back hogs down in Virginia," said Sewall. "That's a fine stunt for a Harvard man—manicuring shoats!"

"Yes, but think of the humanity of it, old top! It's kindness to dumb animals, and besides, if there weren't any Virginia ham, there wouldn't be any free lunch at the Parker House!"

"Monk Spinden," said Sewall dispassionately, "says his dad is going to give him thirty a week to start—he's going to travel all over the Middle West chasing advertising."

"Hope he catches it!" said McHenry.

They crossed Harvard Bridge and hurried through the sordid streets of Cambridgeport, slowing their pace automatically as soon as they emerged into the leaf-hung stretch of the avenue where the odors were less objectionable.

"Well," observed Sewall, "it's been all right to fool around here for four years, but I'll be pretty glad to begin something worth while. Just the same, I wish I felt as familiar with cash as you do. Sometimes it gives me the shivers to remember I've got to earn a living!"

"There's only one way to succeed," said Pepper sagely. "Keep your shirt on, and don't do too much work yourself. As a brilliant illustration—the men digging the subway get a dollar a day, and any one of 'em could lick both of us with one hand. But the lad who sat back and smoked his cigar and figured out *how* to build the subway—he's the one with the big roll!"

"Straight goods," insisted Sewall, as they came to the square and headed for McHenry's room, "how much money do you honestly want to make?"

"Take the biggest ship in the world," returned Pepper promptly, "and fill it with needles, so full that one more needle would sink the ship, and wear every one of 'em down to the eye making bags to hold my wad—and I'd probably be just as indifferent as I am now!"

Sewall said nothing. What was the use in trying to coöperate on day-dreams with a man who had an imagination like that?

In McHenry's study Monk Spinden was experimenting with the banjo.

"Wait a second!" he murmured to their salutations. "I can do the first four notes of 'Fair Harvard.' Wait a minute! By gosh, that isn't so rotten for a man who never tackled it before, is it?"

McHenry took the instrument away from him and put it behind the bookshelves.

"You come over and eat," he said severely. "You musical geniuses never take proper care of yourselves!"

"All right. There's some mail for you, though, and a note from the office. Terry just brought it over."

"Any news?" asked Sewall, as McHenry slit the envelope. "That little Ethiopian knows more about what's going on than anybody on the faculty!"

"Oh, he said there's some crazy new idea—regular prep-school stuff—about paying your bills before you get your degree——"

"Holy mackerel!" bawled McHenry suddenly. "Well, *what* do you know about that!"

"What's the trouble, Pep?"

"Trouble!" He rammed his hands deep in his pockets, and glowered at them. *"Trouble!* Why—why, a couple

of the pin-headed ginks around the square I owe money to have *complained to the office!"*

Sewall and Spinden exchanged quick glances.

"Why, Pep," said Spinden, "that's *rotten!* Didn't you hear what Terry told me?"

"I wasn't listening."

"He said there's a brilliant scheme to make fellows clean up all their bills in the square before they can take their degrees."

"*You* do the worrying," interpolated Sewall. "That's easy. All Pep has to do is to write home, and his dad sends him another barrel of bonds. The only thing is that it was pretty cheap of those people to tell the office."

McHenry, whistling savagely, opened his second letter. Shortly afterward he turned his eyes to the ceiling and emitted an exclamation which, if translated into English, would be unprintable. As Spinden said later, it was the most profane sound without words ever produced in a civilized community.

"More trouble?" inquired the tactless Sewall.

McHenry swallowed two or three times, filled his worst pipe with some dusty tobacco, burned his fingers with a safety match, and so arrived at coherence.

"Merely nothing," he sniffed. "Oh, absolutely nothing at all. Every year I've been a few hundred in the hole when college was over, and dad always gave me a check. I thought I'd anticipate it this year by a couple of months. Here's his answer. He says he's financed me for twenty-two years, and it's about time for me to pay my own debts! In other words——"

"You're stung!" gasped Spinden.

McHenry smoked stolidly.

"I must owe five or six hundred dollars altogether. Dad says he doesn't expect to send me another sou! Regular dad stuff. Get out and make good, pay my bills, and feel like a prince! Shucks! Prince is a dog's name! How the mischief can I raise six hundred dollars two months from Commencement? Everybody who isn't broke is tightwadding it for Class Day!"

"You could sell your runabout?"

"No, I couldn't. My family'd never forget it."

"Don't you suppose if you wrote home and explained things, your father might shoot along a little check?"

"You don't know him. On the contrary, he'd say it served me right."

"Pepper!" said Sewall abruptly.

"Spring it."

"Remember what you said on the way out here about how easy it is to make money?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, here's a mighty good chance to prove it. You say it's a cinch. So go on and make some!"

"I could do it if I wanted to," said Pepper.

"You could, could you?"

"I certainly could."

"Not without borrowing from somebody?"

"Absolutely."

"Not without selling off some of your junk, or hocking your watch?"

"I sure could."

"In two months?"

"In two *weeks,"* said Pepper sweetly.

"For how much?"

"I'll bet fifty——"

"You're on," said Sewall.

"Take you," said Spinden.

McHenry sat down to meditate.

"You fellows never take into consideration," he said, "the fact that it's ridiculously easy to make money. Why, you can make it out of almost anything."

"Excuse me, Pepper, but you're raving," yawned Sewall.

"No, I'm not. Why—why, a man with any brains can make money selling collar buttons."

"You couldn't make thirty cents selling collar buttons," scoffed Spinden. "Let's eat."

"On the whole," mused Pepper, "that's rather clever. It certainly is. There's real money in it. I suppose I might as well make six hundred in collar buttons as in anything else."

"If you'd promise to play fair, I'd take a shot——"

"I'll bet you fifty more I can make six hundred dollars selling collar buttons inside of a month——"

"Taken," said Sewall.

"You're on," said Spinden.

McHenry removed tie and collar and began to unfasten his shirt.

"Here," said Spinden. "Don't change your clothes. We're going right out to eat."

"I'm with you, old top," promised McHenry. "I won't keep you three minutes—I just want to see how they go to work to make these collar buttons."

As a matter of fact, he couldn't have borrowed money if he had tried. Parents are notably suspicious near the end of senior year; and, as Pepper had remarked, those men who weren't in financial straits were already hoarding against Class Day. It was out of the question to dispose of his furniture and accessories, partly because he still needed them, and partly because the spring is no season for putting second-hand furniture on the market in Cambridge. The coming crop of freshmen isn't yet in evidence, and last year's crop has matured.

McHenry visited U4, held a brief but spirited argument with the visible exponent of temporal authority, and returned to his room much chastened in spirit. The university had noted with horror the laxity of morals displayed by late classes with regard to the payment of bills, and intended to exercise some slight supervision over the graduating class. Men in arrears to the amount of three hundred dollars or more must furnish satisfactory evidence of payment before the sheepskins would be handed out.

McHenry wrote a wonderfully diplomatic letter home, hinting at all sorts of dire mishaps which had befallen him; and received by return mail a second epistle from his father to the effect that if Pepper owed money, he had better make arrangements to pay it as soon as possible.

McHenry sighed dolefully, revised his estimate of his influence with various parties, and began to think. In spite of his apparent attitude of indifference to the conventions of college, he would consider himself hopelessly and eternally disgraced if he left it without his diploma. He knew that if he simply had to acquire by his own efforts the sum of six hundred dollars in order to obtain that diploma, he could do it.

That was purely incidental. Nevertheless, it was his father's judgment which had sent him to Cambridge; and if he should fail for any reason whatsoever to take his degree, it would be his father's judgment which would be compromised. For himself, he had wagered, in cold anger, that he could accumulate the required amount by the sale of one of the commonest and cheapest and least speculative articles of masculine attire; and if he failed to accumulate it, the stain would be on his own judgment, and his alone.

That was what hurt him most. He had made a rash and a childish statement, backed it, as he usually backed his wildest statements, with the solid support of a bet; and it was his proudest boast that he had never lost a bet when it hinged upon some action of his own. Having committed himself to sell collar buttons, he resolved to sell them.

His friends said he was slightly affected by the heat; and when any man

made that remark in Pepper's presence it meant another annotation in the memorandum book, and another bit of allowance risked on the ingenuity of McHenry.

The most astonishing feature of his campaign was that it didn't seem to deprive Cambridge of his society. To be sure, he spent a morning and two or three afternoons in Boston, but after that he lounged about his customary haunts in customary idleness; and to all requests for information on the subject of getting rich quickly, he replied that he was a thinker, not a worker, and that salaried, servile minions were taking care of the detail.

The curiosity of his closest friends was so great, and their indignation at his reticence was so acute, that Spinden and Roger Ward undertook one day to shadow him to town and discover for themselves the field of his activities.

Without particular difficulty, they trailed him to the Bow Street garage, distant about a hundred yards from his dormitory, whence he sped quickly, a moment later, in the battered runabout which had now seen two years' service, but still served to remind them that if they hadn't formed the Prohibition Club, McHenry would yet be riding in trolley cars.

They tried to flag him, but he squawked at them with his Klaxon, and disappeared down the avenue, disgorging oil, regurgitating smoke, and exhaling a fearful odor of burned gas at every revolution of the wheels.

Spinden and Ward looked at each other in vast discomfiture.

"Well, we're regular detectives, anyway," said Spinden. "We didn't find out a darned thing."

"Yes, we did," contradicted Ward. "He must have got some money somewhere, or he couldn't have taken the boat out of the garage. Don't you know he owed 'em a hundred, and they wouldn't let go of the machine until he paid up?"

"A hundred!" ejaculated Spinden. "Well, if he's made as much as a hundred in a few days——"

"That's what I was thinking," said Ward uneasily. "I've got twenty on that proposition myself."

On the following morning, they interrogated him, maintaining that it was cruelty of the most refined sort for him to wear such a smug expression to lectures, and to grin so sickenly whenever some one spoke to him in a respectful and gentlemanly manner.

"I'll tell you this much," said McHenry, "I've discovered a whale of a big idea. It's worth so much that I don't know whether I ought to tell it to a couple of simps like you or not. Well, it's just this: you understand all about this supply and demand stuff, don't you? Of course you do—we all got scared into taking Ec One together. Well, when you want to sell something, you get the supply, and then get the demand. That's all."

"Get the demand! Come closer, Pep, come closer!"

"Create it, if you have to," explained McHenry. "As for example, we all know perfectly well that little children don't moan in their trundle beds because papa doesn't wear some special brand of collar buttons, don't we? And nobody lies writhing on a bed of pain until the doctor writes a telegram for a new supply of the things—and a man doesn't go and buy a collar button the way he does a cigar, or a drink, either. *So*—when I got into this fool scheme with you people, I naturally had to go and create a demand. Incidentally, I *did!*"

"I wish I thought you're a liar, Pep!" complained Spinden. "The trouble with you is that I'm always afraid you're telling the truth."

McHenry grinned, and brought from the drawer of his desk two envelopes.

"I haven't opened these yet," he said, "but I guess I know what's in 'em. You can look if you want to."

Accordingly they looked; and they found two receipted bills, one from the haberdashery where Pepper bought the most outrageous novelties in Cambridge; the other from the garage. The total amount involved was considerably over two hundred dollars.

"You don't mean to say," breathed Ward, in an awed voice, "that you've made that much *peddling!*"

"Oh, I don't do the peddling myself," said McHenry airily. "I can't waste time with the little fellows. The only people I see are the magnates—the guys I can meet on an equal footing, you know."

"Magnates!" snorted Spinden.

"Yes, magnates!" retorted McHenry. "Just to keep you from being so fresh, I'll remark in passing that I lunched with one of 'em at the Exchange Club yesterday noon. Believe me or not, I don't care. I've got the lunch all stowed away, and I deposited a check in the First National this morning."

"This man McHenry," said Spinden to Ward, "is going to be either the President of the United States or a jailbird before our triennial—and I don't know which."

"Whichever I am," said Pepper generously, "I'll always count on you when I need help. The easiest way to make money I know of is to take it away from simple souls like you fellows on a bet. By the way, I've got only a week or two more to run. Want to double the stakes?"

"No, thank you, Pepper!" they said in chorus.

On the day specified for the termination of the contract, McHenry gathered into his room all the men who had wagered against him, and supplied cigars, cigarettes, and some very tasteless beer which, he assured them, was much better for their digestions than if he had remembered to order ice with it. When the assembled company—and it wasn't a very hilarious company—had sampled the beer and unanimously expressed a preference for water, McHenry sat on the top of his desk and harangued them.

"I've just been over the figures," he began, "and this aggregation of physical and mental giants I see before me owes me exactly seven hundred and thirty dollars. Some of the cowardly gentlemen didn't show up, and one classmate whom I won't mention save by inference—his name is Street, and he's a mean hound!—hedged. But the amount coming to me is seven thirty."

"Prove it!" said a man in the back of the room.

"I will, my gentle gazelle," Pepper assured him. "That is, if you fellows will take a lot of receipted bills and my check book as evidence."

"Well, how in thunder do *we* know how you got it?" demanded Sewall.

"That's the point! I want to explain how it is. Well, I'll give you my absolute, rock-bottom, gilt-edged word of honor that I made every single cent of that wad in collar buttons."

"Prove it, Pep!"

"You must have something to show for it!"

"Oh, I'll take Pep's word! Don't be idiots!"

"Sure, we'll take his word—but the trouble with this lad is that you're never quite sure what he's talking about."

"Prove it, Pep—if there's money in it, we might want to get in with you."

"That's it exactly," said McHenry. "The scheme is so confoundedly simple that I don't want to give it up until Class Day at least. So I ask you to take my word——"

"Yea, that's a fine, fat stunt! We take your word, and you take our

money! Why don't you take *our* word —we'll pay up when you *prove* up!"

"*Now* you're talking!" said Sewall wickedly.

"Suits me," agreed Pepper. "There's only one hitch in it. You're all together now, and by Class Day I couldn't collect more than one of you at a time."

"Nothing doing, Pep!"

"Oh, that's *too* obvious!"

"We're none of us Rockefellers! Come up with the big idea!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said McHenry. "To any man in this room who'll write me a check *now* for what he owes me, I'll tell the whole thing—privately."

The men instinctively turned to catch the eyes of some one else. No one spoke.

"More than that," said Pepper, "to any man who'll write that check now —and so that nobody tries to quibble, I'd suggest that the man who writes it goes down to Leavitt's to cash it, and bring real money back with him—to any man who'll do that, I'll give a tenth interest in the scheme."

"But I haven't *got* a hundred in the bank," said Spinden plaintively.

"Neither have I," said Sewall.

"I'm overdrawn as it is," apologized Ward. "And they're raising Cain about it."

"Oh, threaten to withdraw your deficit and put it in the Cambridge Trust if they won't shut up," advised McHenry. "That's what I did once—it made 'em so cheerful they let me overdraw some more."

"I was going to ask you for time, anyway," said Phillips frankly. "As a matter of fact, Pep, I never thought I'd lose."

"I didn't either."

"Can't do it, Pep, old top."

McHenry grinned quizzically.

"What a fine bunch of financiers I see in this room!" he scored them. "After all the big talk you made, you'd be in a nice hole if I *did* prove up to you, wouldn't you?" He pondered diligently. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "Seeing you're all so hard up, and Class Day's coming, and I'd hate to see any nice girls going around without flowers on account of me, I'll compromise for fifty cents on the dollar if you'll pay now. Otherwise, I might have to dun you on Class Day for the full amount. What about it?"

Spinden grabbed for his check book.

"I'll take you up!" he said, scribbling as fast as he could.

"Lend me a blank check, will you?" asked Phillips.

"My dear young friends," said Pepper wearily, taking a little heap of white slips from his desk, "*when* will you learn that your uncle Pepper is a great man? Here's enough blank checks to pay the national debt!"

One man paused in the act of signing.

"This is perfectly square, isn't it?" he queried. "We know you must have made six hundred, Pep, but you swear it was in collar buttons?"

"I'll swear it any time," McHenry assured him. "Any time I can keep my face straight!"

"Well——" The man completed his signature and waved the check in air to dry it. "You'd sting us somehow anyway, Pep—I'll take your word for it, and think I'm lucky!"

"Lucky!" grinned McHenry. "You're shot with it!" He produced from his pocket a handful of little trinkets which glistened in the sunlight. "As a memento of this delightful occasion," he added, "I want to present each of you with a little souvenir—a fourteen-karat collar button, with my compliments!"

There was a firm rap on the door; Sewall, opening it, beheld the radiant features of Terry, the sable messenger of the gods who dwell in University Hall.

"Hello, Terry!" sang out McHenry. "What's new?"

"Oh, nothin' much," said Terry, dropping a letter on the window seat. "Just a li'l' bit o' congratulations from the dean!"

Four days prior to Class Day, McHenry's room became the mecca of all those who felt that their funds couldn't do justice to the affection they cherished for certain young ladies of Boston and vicinity.

Hearing that McHenry was again a capitalist, they sought him out; and he, exercising the privilege of capitalists the world over, delivered a long didactic lecture in each case before he advanced the loan.

It wasn't his conception of sanity, he said, for men speedily to undertake the running of elevators, the cleaning of inkwells, the treading of State Street with wallets chained to their wrists, to waste money buying flowers and extra Pudding tickets, and spread tickets for girls they couldn't afford to marry, anyway.

In listening to the counter arguments, he was astonished and highly gratified to learn how many of these men were bringing their sisters to the festivity; but he responded by insisting that any well-bred sister would be so startled at the unexpected extravagance in the way of flowers that she would probably analyze them as a bribe, a mere blind to divert attention from some recent defection, and so the shortsighted brother would be suspected of untold sins. Nevertheless, he made the loans.

McHenry himself didn't remain in Cambridge for Class Day. He had never been a ladies' man, and he knew that if he prowled about the yard in search of amusement, he was sure to come upon some of the men who had borrowed money to entertain their "sisters," and that the meetings would be embarrassing for all concerned.

Even so, he managed to keep his covenant to three or four of his immediate circle, and left them fully convinced that James Pepper McHenry could make a fortune in toothpicks or birdseed if he gave his mind to the problem for a sufficient length of time.

He did not, however, shun Commencement. Class Day was a mere garden party, with the view obstructed on all sides; but Commencement was an occasion of deeper significance. Throughout his four years, Pepper had orated humorously and cynically against that species of mankind known as the "greasy grind," but when it came to the final issue, he wanted to sit in Sanders Theater in his thin black gown and applaud the Latin salutatory, given by a man he had never met. That man had accomplished something!

He wanted to hear the class oration and the poem, and he wanted to sing the ode, although he flattered himself that he could have done better with one hand than the nervous author. He yelled himself hoarse at the honorary degrees; sang "Fair Harvard" at least as loudly as the men on either side of him, and faked the second and third verses, as every one else did. Then, escaping from the stuffy auditorium among the first, he sprinted over to the new lecture hall, where he dived into the basement, and had the questionable distinction of receiving the first degree in his class—not the first in rank, but the first in time.

It was not his nature to delay in the yard for melancholy retrospection. It was all over, and it wouldn't do any good to hang around and wail about it. Besides, his father had come unexpectedly to Cambridge, heard the speeches from the gallery of Sanders, and arranged to meet his son in town at noon. Pepper did none of the things which the departing graduate is supposed to

do. He shed not a tear at the dear old library; dropped not a pearl of recollection on the steps of dear old Sever; wasted not a whistle of recognition on the dear old squirrels. He merely hopped down to the dear old subway, and carried his diploma in to his father.

"Well, boy," said Mr. McHenry, "so this is it? What does all that mean?"

"It means," explained Pepper, "that I'm admitted to the fellowship of educated men."

"James," said his father, "they've misjudged you. By the way, I was rather annoyed that you didn't write more about your finances for the last few months. You distressed me a great deal by asking for so much money."

"Oh, I came out all right," said Pepper.

His father ordered a modest luncheon, without the appurtenances to which Pepper was accustomed. The head waiter, scenting the circumstances, winked at Pepper behind his father's back.

"I came over chiefly to see if I couldn't get you in with some friends of mine on State Street," said Mr. McHenry. "We'll take that up this afternoon. As I was saying—if you hadn't showed so many signs of weakness in your financial affairs, I'd take you in with me, but as it is, I think you'd better get some unprejudiced training first. How did you get out of your need for money in April?"

"Collar buttons," said Pepper, tasting his cold consommé.

"What?"

"Collar buttons," repeated Pepper. "You wouldn't send me any money, and I don't like to borrow it"—his father nodded approvingly—"so I made some."

"You're not trying to be funny, are you, James?"

"Oh, no."

"Then be a little more communicative."

"Well," began Pepper, "you see, I was broke, and everybody knew it, and we got talking about making money. I said it was a cinch, if you know how. I think I said a man with any sense could make money selling collar buttons, if he knew how. Some of the fellows—er—differed with me. So I showed 'em up."

"How was that?"

Pepper grinned.

"Oh, I thought of a scheme. Of course I knew there wouldn't be anything in selling small lots—you'd have to deal in big figures. So first I came in town and looked for a manufacturer. Well, right there I *was* lucky. I found a little fellow who was making gold-plated ones and solid-gold ones, and he was just about ready to go into bankruptcy. You might as well talk up to people, you know—it doesn't cost anything. I asked him what it would be worth if I could sell a couple of thousand dollars' worth of his junk. He nearly had epilepsy, and said he'd give me fifty per cent for all I'd sell. Then I went to the biggest laundry in Boston. I asked 'em how many new customers they get a year, and how many they keep—how many quit to go somewhere else. Then I asked 'em what they'd pay for a little advertising dodge to please a new customer so much that he'd never think of changing. They got interested about that time. Well—I told them that whenever they got a new man customer, to send all his shirts back to him with gold collar buttons in the holes instead of these little cheap black or white ones they do put in. Of course I had a pretty long argument—well, they bought a lot of 'em. Then I said what a great scheme it would be to use those buttons on the delivery just before Christmas for *all* their customers. They saw that, too, but they said it was too far ahead to buy supplies. I had to have that order, so I

sold 'em at cost. I didn't make any commission, but it was good business—because I could go across the street to the *second* biggest laundry, and tell them about it! And—well, after the second day I made the manufacturer pay me fifty dollars a week salary besides the commission. I got a trade list of laundries all over the country, and sent 'em circular letters. Then I hired two or three decent young men that had been down and out—I got their names through the Y. M. C. A.—and paid 'em ten dollars a week to go through this whole section—you know there are a lot of fairly big towns not more than a dollar's car fare from here. And then I got the idea of going to the haberdashers—only the ones that sell high-priced shirts, and getting them to put these buttons in the shirts. You see, dad, they were pretty fine buttons, and lower by three dollars a gross than anything else on the market. I guess that's all."

"James," said his father, "how much money did you make?"

"Oh, not much—I paid the solicitors myself—maybe two thousand."

"You made two thousand dollars—and that was your own scheme?"

"Of course it was!" retorted Pepper indignantly. "Why? Doesn't it sound foolish enough?"

Mr. McHenry put his hand on the table with such vigor that the glasses rocked.

"James," he suggested, "I guess perhaps we'd better go back to Chicago together. I can use a few brains right in the office. Do you think you could get along in brokerage?"

"Sure I could!" said Pepper. "No different from college, is it? All you have to do is think a little faster than the next man. How much do I get?"

"We generally start beginners at ten dollars a week," said his father jocosely. "What do you imagine you could earn?"

"Well," dreamed Pepper, "how much money *is* there in Chicago?"

He stayed at the Touraine with his father that night. When he unpacked his suit case, the diploma rolled over the side and tumbled to the floor. He picked it up, smoothed it out, and read the solemn Latinity with intense seriousness.

"Educated, by gosh!" said Pepper.

He undressed slowly, switched off the light, and scrambled into bed. At the end of an hour, he raised himself on his elbow and grinned rapturously in the darkness.

"Great old dump!" he murmured enthusiastically.

All his yesterdays were behind him; to-morrow he must begin the great race of life, and he longed for it passionately. Confident, eager, secure in the realization of his future, he could hardly wait for the daylight to come.

"Of course," he admitted to himself, "they're all good fellows—*darned* good fellows; but, after all, that was just playing! It was too easy! Now I can be a regular business man."

For a moment he dreamed happily of the life he would lead, the fortune he would make, the clubs he would join—illogically his memory reverted to Phillips and Ward and Sewall and Spinden, who lived so widely apart, whose lives had mingled so closely with his, and now would touch it only between trains, or at brief reunions. He remembered their famous Prohibition Club, their track meets, their Med. Fac. escapade, the interclass football victories; their quarrels and their loves and their probations and their politics—of course that was very juvenile, and his life work was just opening before him; but——

"By gosh!" he whispered, in the darkness. "By *gosh*, I wish I were a freshman!"

The Sandlotter

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "Guns—and a Girl," "The Army of God," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART.

Matters come to a tragic head between white and Jap, in Tehama County, California, when a rich lumberman and his family are murdered by the yellow butler, Osuke. For years trouble had been brewing because the Japanese had slowly and surely undermined the supremacy of the white fruit growers, until the prosperity of the American natives was seriously threatened. Therefore, it was with grim purpose, together with a bias of personal animosity, that Sheriff Blount and the young, hot-headed editor, Engstrom, The Sandlotter, start off on their manhunt. Osuke is overtaken, badly wounded, and lodged in Red Buttes jail, but not before the sheriff and Engstrom have to quell a mob of men who want to take justice into their own rash hands. But the long brooding upon their wrongs breaks out into violent expression of race hatred on the part of the Californians. "The Japs Must Go!" is the slogan. Engstrom, an eloquent writer, impulsive and fiery, leads public opinion. His editorials stir the State. Romola Lees, the financée of Engstrom, encourages him in his attitude, for her father had suffered at the hands of the Japanese, especially one wily contractor, Shimasuki. Upon this excited scene appears the figure of a stranger, calling himself Luke Siever, who declares himself to be the representative of the Grangers' Alliance, which has been organized to oust the yellow man. Siever selects Engstrom to go to Sacramento as assemblyman, to protest against the Oriental invasion, and ask for redress. A mass meeting is held and Engstrom is unanimously elected. That night madness blinds the eyes of the aggrieved men, and they rush to the section called "Japtown" to wreak personal vengeance. There is a sanguinary street battle, leaving in its wake a toll of dead numbering seven white men and five Japanese.

(A Two-Part Story—Part Two)

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CRUSADE.

RED BUTTES awoke to soberness with the dawn. The midnight train from the south had brought two companies of national guardsmen, ordered out of Marysville and Chico by the governor, acting on Lee Blount's telegraphed appeal. When the sun rose, men in khaki, with bayonets fixed, were patrolling the single street of Japtown, while rows of brown tents sprouted up amid the poppies along the road between the Oriental quarter and the bridge. Martial law ruled.

By the first afternoon train from San Francisco came a horde of eager reporters and photographers to pry and probe into the raw wound of the night's madness. Came also a very grave-faced little Japanese gentleman, tightly buttoned in a frock coat and wearing a tile of severe ceremony: the consul general. He was accompanied by his counselor and two secretaries, a Japanese and an American—an imposing suite. The faces of the Japanese visitors were set in an impassive stare as they rode from the station to the Tremont House and again from the hotel down Main Street and over the bridge to the scene of the riot; they were impervious to the street's curiosity.

The town vaguely sensed portent of trouble in the presence of the Japanese officials; probably they were "going to kick up a fuss because a few Japs got shot up." Red Buttes did not know that in Tokyo, fourteen thousand miles away, boys with bells at their waist

This story began in the October 7th issue.

were coursing the streets, waking the dark with their news cry of Red Buttes' name and new fame; nor that in Washington what was already termed "the Red Buttes affair" had provoked a call upon the secretary of state by the ambassador of Japan and the summoning of an extraordinary meeting of the cabinet. That the killing in unprovoked attack of five subjects of His Imperial Majesty Yoshihito had gravely endangered the peace of two world powers was not even guessed; Red Buttes knew, nor cared, nothing for the world beyond the peaks of her bounding mountains.

The one big fact of the new day in Red Buttes was that seven white men had been slain by Japanese, and that the yellow men still held their ground across the river.

The town was unrepentant, vengeful, and in a half-comprehended way afraid —of itself.

Engstrom was in his office with the coming of day, feverishly throwing into the form of an "extra" the story of the attack on Japtown. He had not slept. Heading a party of physicians, he had gone across the river after the flight of the mob and collected from the shadowed fields and cottonwood thickets about the river road the wounded who wandered there, some delirious, some weak from knife wounds and the gouging of glass. Then he had returned with the first company of militiamen to perform the harder service of bringing back to the Buttes the bodies of the rioters who had met death in the fight.

The horror of the night's work was heavy on him. In the near approach to hysteria induced by the tasks of those dark hours the man's heart cried out protest—not against the violence that had driven his townspeople into the blood fury, but against the condition which, in his mind, was responsible for the mob's act. He had defended the law on the steps of Doc Bowles' house only a few days before; yes, there was a concrete instance when the law provided a remedy to be respected. But in this grim affair what law guaranteed relief from the burden of the alien invasion; how had the mob transgressed when an impulse old as the world—the impulse of race antipathy—launched it to action? Ethics find no hearing in the face of passions. John Engstrom, champion of law, reasoned not at all; took no heed that the broader law of right between nations had been flouted; knew only that the inevitable conflict between white men and yellow men had suddenly flamed into tragedy.

So on the front page of his "extra" he put the names of those killed within a black boarder and under the heading, "First Victims of the War With Japan." August Stollberg, the berry farmer; Pedro Villaconda, the hog rancher; Tony Castillo, the tamale maker; Olaf Stridenberg, the blacksmith—so the list ran.

And on the front page, too, in double-column measure, the *Standard and News* editor placed his editorial, written in the gray hours of dawn when horror weighed intolerably upon him and his brain was staggering under the half-incoherent thoughts that galloped through it. Thus he began it:

Seven white men of California have been sacrificed in proof that white men and Japanese cannot live side by side in a white man's country. It is a terrible proof!

Long have we argued this proposition. Many facts we have brought to bear upon the contention that yellow men of different birth, different mode of thought, different habits, and morals cannot, do not desire to, assimilate with men of the race we call American. Now, God sees it, the demonstration has been made. Perhaps old Gus Stollberg and those six others who fell with him in the street of Japtown last night have not died in vain!

You, over the other side of the range; you, back there in the East, consider these seven dead! Call them seven ruffians who were

righteously slain by the innocent little Japanese in defense of their rights. Say they were typical flannel mouths, sand-lotters, agitators! You are at liberty to say these things, but if you do you must not complain of a "new sectionalism west of the Rockies."

Whatever that "new sectionalism" may be, it lies east of the Rockies, and it is born in ignorance, and fed on selfishness.

Luke Siever, of the Alliance, was waiting for Engstrom in the newspaper office when the latter returned from a hasty breakfast. His face was grave.

"Engstrom, I'm afraid you're going it pretty strong," he said, pointing to the mourning border and the double-column editorial on the front page of the paper laid on the desk. "That's going to raise an awful howl from Frisco to Washington."

"Let it!" Engstrom quickly answered. "That's what I want. Anyway, it's the truth; isn't it?"

The walking delegate of the grangers cast a quick look at the editor's drawn face, at his bloodshot eyes glowing as if under the stimulus of brandy. He had seen such faces, such eyes, in the old days in San Francisco, when the torches of Dennis Kearney's mob threatened the palaces on Nob Hill.

"I know, my boy; but truth isn't always the best thing to spout. This is going to mark you at Sacramento—and maybe in Washington. Savvy that?"

Engstrom checked himself at the point of passionate outburst, and eyed the face of Siever narrowly.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Why, just this: I've had some little talks with the people who run the Democratic party in this county, and we've slated you for the legislature. You'll go in as the representative of the Grangers' Alliance from Tehama. No doubt of your election on the Jap issue. But what happened last night—and this fire-eating stuff of yours on top of it—why, I'm afraid it'll give you just a *leetle* too strong a stamp for our—for the purposes of the Alliance."

"You mean that I—you think I can be elected to——" Engstrom was trembling.

"And Washington, you see, keeps a pretty close eye on the men that go to our legislature," Siever continued, ignoring the interruption. "On this anti-Jap legislation business we can't start anything so raw it'll put Washington in a hole. This stuff you've printed is—raw!"

"What's Washington got to do with something printed in the Tehama *Standard and News?*" Engstrom queried petulantly. "A good many thousand miles——"

Siever, a slow smile creasing his face, rose to go. He held out his hand.

"John Engstrom, you're all right. But one trouble with you is you don't know you belong to the United States. You don't give a hang for anything outside Tehama County and California. Think over this legislature business, and let me know soon how you stand on it. Meanwhile—soft pedal on this red-headed newspaper stuff, my boy!"

Engstrom, alone in the little office behind the silent press, fought a great weariness. Though his body called for rest his brain would not be still. Against the nimbus of the night's horror appeared the new, shining idea Siever had brought—confirmation of that vague hope Rommie Lees had inspired a few days before. He, John Engstrom, to be representative of Tehama's ranchers in the legislature, champion of the revolt against the yellow men at the State's seat of law! He had only to say "Yes," and the wonderful responsibility was his!

But the cost?

He took his bankbook from the safe and scanned the figure under the red line which indicated his balance there—just twelve hundred dollars. Those digits represented the still incomplete

sum of promised happiness—the foundation of a home for one who was waiting to share it. Every dollar of those twelve hundred had been dedicated a sacrifice to a great love. How slowly had the sum mounted! With what labor had he strained to wrest from his inky shop this gage of heart's desire fulfilled!

"Oh, Rommie! Rommie!"

Overwrought nerves took toll in this cry. Engstrom, suddenly ashamed of what seemed to him unmanly impulse to give way to tears, rose from his chair, and reached for his hat. It hung over a yellowed and dust-covered railroad map of the United States, all streaked and crisscrossed by the red tendrils of communication.

"Trouble with you is you don't give a hang for anything outside Tehama County and California!"

The words of the organizer sounded again in Engstrom's ears. One hand still groping for the hat, he looked quizzically at the map. Somehow, it seemed he had never seen a map of the United States before; there was curiosity in his close inspection. There, away over where big letters spelled "Atlantic Ocean," little printed names stuck out from a coast line: "Gloucester," "Perth Amboy," "Norfolk," "Charleston." He saw that "Augusta" was marked with a star, and remembered his school rote, "Maine, Augusta, on the Kennebec River." Then in the broad middle of the map, where little names of towns were not crowded so closely, he read divisional titles, "Wisconsin," "Tennessee," "Louisiana." Sure—Louisiana; that's where New Orleans was; yes, there was New Orleans right where the big river divided itself into little sticks. He brought his eyes over to the great strip of the Pacific coast marked "California." There it stretched, spanning parallels of latitude with magnificent assurance, equaling in its length more than half the crowded jumble of the Atlantic seaboard. There were the heavy parallel lines of its mountains, looping six hundred miles from south to north, the broad basin of the Sacramento and San Joaquin between. California, the remote, the isolated empire at the edge of the West!

"That's right; I *don't* give a hang for anything outside of Tehama County and California!"

Engstrom answered aloud the challenge of Siever's criticism, and he took a little penny flag, relic of some native sons' jubilee, from its place behind a lithograph of Lincoln and punched the slender staff through the map squarely in the middle of California so that the particolored bit of cambric hung stiffly out at the State's girdle. Then he got out his motor cycle, and started for Los Pinos Rancho, out under the white sun haze beyond the river.

Rommie came with a little cry at the coughing of his motor on the graveled road leading to the ranch house. Her face showed the strain of her anxiety. As she kissed him she murmured her thankfulness that he had not been caught in the red wrath of the night.

"I'm tired—just tired," he assured. "Get out your runabout and let's go on up the Lassen Road—anywhere. Lots to talk about."

In five minutes they were out of the gateway and turned toward the distant white cones of Lassen, in the thin, clear air like frozen foam on the long crest of the mountain's billow. To the north, over the river's fringe of green, the splinter of Mount Shasta, sixty miles away, showed bold and white. All the horizon between the snowy peaks was ribbed and notched by the blue Sierra; in closer prospect was the mottled brown of the foothills, rising rank on rank to melt into the blurred wall of the higher places.

As the girl sat at the wheel, eyes ahead on the red streak of the road, the man talked. First he told her what

he knew of the attack on Japtown; how the suspicion that Osuke, the murderer, was helped to escape by his countrymen had fired the quick anger of the mob; how Lee Blount had vainly tried to stay the attack, and what the grisly spectacle he himself had seen a few hours later. Next he recited the conversation that had ensued upon Luke Siever's visit of the morning—the offer of a seat at Sacramento so confidently made by the Alliance organizer.

"It's there, Rommie girl; I know the place is there for me to fill if only I say the word." Engstrom's voice thrilled under the sudden glow of pride in the eyes of his beloved. "But can you and I make the sacrifice? The money, my girl; why, it will set me back——"

"John Engstrom, it is your duty," Rommie interrupted. "You are not the man I—I want you to be if you let your own—our selfish desires—stand in the way. John Engstrom and Romola Lees can wait; but this"—she swept one hand out to the golden and green land—"this cannot wait. I—I will be the wife of the Honorable John Engstrom, of Tehama; not just young John, of Red Buttes."

He leaned over the wheel and kissed her. His pledge was in the kiss.

Up they mounted among the little hills, where occasionally the road turned to lay before them the broad panorama of the green and oak-spotted valley, sliced in twain by the silver thread of the Sacramento. Away back there sprawled the town; all about it the ranch country, fining in the laboratory of the sun the gold of coming harvest. They spoke of this country—their country—with almost a Grail veneration. Two idealists—two Crusaders, they, pledged to a hope high as the succor of the Holy Sepulcher.

Not before the wall of the Coast Range was throwing a long shadow on the floor of the valley did their ride come to an end. Lights were twinkling in the streets when Engstrom went to Luke Siever's room at the Tremont House and put his hand in Siever's with a terse "I'll do it."

Next day the organizer's prophecy of a "howl from Frisco to Washington" began to be substantiated. When the San Francisco papers came the town read of its transgression in accusing black type, and from every angle: Red Buttes, Washington, and Tokyo. Particularly in the *Annals,* an organ strongly pro-Japanese, was the "unparalleled ruffianism of this lawless town" execrated. There, too, in the headlines, in the new story and on the editorial page the name of John Engstrom was prominent. One paragraph read:

> It was this fire-eating young editor, vain in a local reputation as a "Jap hater," who was directly responsible for the launching of a mob against the unoffending Orientals. Abetted by one Luke Siever, well known as a professional agitator in the pay of the anti-Japanese labor leaders, Engstrom was haranguing to violence nearly a thousand ranchers and townsfolk in the local opera house just three hours before the mob marched on the Japanese settlement. But he was careful not to be one of the assaulting party.

The editorial was headed, "John Engstrom, Dangerous Sand-lotter." It adverted to the text of Engstrom's editorial in the extra edition of the Tehama *Standard and News,* as reproduced in the *Annals'* news story, to emphasize the statement that:

> It is such harebrained and ignorant firebrands as he who, having no horizon beyond the precincts of their village or county, willingly bring the nation to the brink of war if only they may vent their own narrow prejudices. Engstrom, knowing nothing about the United States that lies east of the Sierras, and caring less, truculently dares the people of the East to be shocked at the Red Buttes affair, for which he was directly responsible. He even raises the bugaboo of sectionalism to frighten the East into acceptance of the Red Buttes standard of conduct toward the nationals of a friendly power. It is embar-

rassing for the Washington government to be constantly apologizing to the Tokyo government for the kind of citizens John Engstrom represents.

Engstrom read the *Annals'* roast as he was walking from the post office to the newspaper shop. The first reading left him cold, bewildered, groping for a mental hold on himself. So this was the reward of sacrifice for service? This was the welcome a great mouthpiece of the Californian people extended to one ready to fight for the salvation of the land at the cost of dearest desire? Lies; innuendo; misrepresentation! "John Engstrom, Dangerous Sandlotter!"

"Sonny, don't let little things worry you. They don't know young John Engstrom as we do."

A big hand clapped on the editor's shoulder. He looked around into the smiling eyes of Sheriff Blount. With a sudden gesture he tried to conceal under his coat the paper in his hand. Blount shook his head, and smiled the more.

"Thin skin never stood hard knocks, sonny. You're good enough for Red Buttes, and that's all you should bother about."

Blount walked beside him up Main Street, his arm over Engstrom's shoulder. Then surprising things happened. Men crossed the street, hurried out of stores, climbed from the seats of their democrat wagons to surround Engstrom and pump his hand, pat his back. They crowded close to him, walked with him. Heartening calls and hails flew after him from passing autos and ranch wagons. His progress became an ovation until before the heavy pillars of the Tremont House the crowd forced him to halt.

"'Ray fer young John Engstrom! *He's* the boy!"

Several husky young ranchmen drove a wedge through the crowd, gripped Engstrom by the arms and legs, and hoisted him to their shoulders.

"Speech! Speech!"

Engstrom, struggling to free himself from the clutch of his admirers, shook his head. His face was scarlet, and he grinned like a schoolboy at "oratoricals."

"Burn the *Annals.* Burn the lying sheets!" some one shouted. Forthwith out of pockets and from under the seats of democrat wagons and autos came copies of the offending journal. They were cast into a heap in the middle of Main Street and a match put to the pile. As the papers burned the enthusiastic ranchers who held Engstrom prisoner on their shoulders marched solemnly round and round the fire chanting, "Engstrom! Engstrom! 'What's th' matter with Engstrom? *He's* all right!"

From a place behind the half-raised shade by the clerk's desk in the hotel Luke Siever watched the proceedings. His lean, hawk's face was all crinkled and broken by a broad smile.

The following day, which was the day set for the public funeral of the white men killed in the riot, Rommie Lees came early to town. First she went to the Grangers' National Bank, and was a half hour behind the glass door marked, "President's Office." Then by telephone she made an appointment with Luke Siever. She met the grangers' organizer in the deserted little park in the Western Addition where few would be likely to see them. When the tall, gangling figure of the walking delegate approached, Rommie, without preliminaries, launched into the reason for her seeking an interview.

"I am Romola Lees. My father opened the organization meeting of the Grangers' Alliance, you remember. John Engstrom and I are to be married—soon; but he tells me that you believe—you want him to run for the legislature."

Siever stood with his soiled panama

in his hand, his eyes frankly admiring the fresh beauty of the girl.

"I want him to run, ma'am, because he's the best possible man for the job, and he can have it for the asking," he said.

"The only thing that stands in the way of his making the campaign is his lack of money," Rommie continued. "John hasn't very much, and what little he has was for—for making a home for us both." A faint blush came to her cheeks and sped. "He did not want to use this money for his campaign and his expenses while away from the paper until I urged that it was his duty to do so. We both agree that he owes it to the people here to go to Sacramento, and——"

"To himself, too, ma'am," Siever put in. "John Engstrom feels too strong on the Jap question not to give himself a chance to put his feelings into action."

"How much will it cost him—the campaign and all?" Rommie put the question abruptly.

Siever scratched his long chin in thought. "Well, that—would—be hard—to say. Depends upon how strong the other fella is in this assembly district, and what kind of a campaign he puts up. Might be——"

"A thousand dollars?"

"Lord love you, ma'am; a thousand would carry Tehama, Shasta, and a slice of Siskiyou thrown in," Siever laughed.

"But a thousand dollars would cover all expenses?" Rommie insisted.

"Certain sure!"

Satisfaction shone in the girl's eyes. She hurried on:

"Well, this is my scheme, Mr. Siever: I have a thousand dollars on deposit at the Grangers' National; it's been there since my mother left it to me at her death. To-day I've transferred it to John's name. It can be drawn on by you, as his campaign manager, Mr. Bone, the president, tells me if you get a power of attorney or something regular like that from John. That is to cover all campaign expenses, from the primary right on to election. Do you understand?"

Siever stood looking down into her eyes with a quizzical pucker about his mouth.

"Seems to me, ma'am, you put a power of trust in me, a total stranger to you," he drawled.

"John trusts you," she answered simply.

"You're the doctor!" The organizer spread out his hands with a gesture of acceptance.

"But there's only one condition," Rommie added. "And that is positive: John must not know under any circumstances where the money came from. If he should find out that I was financing his campaign he would quit right then. Can't you tell him the Grangers' Alliance had put up an expense fund for you to use as campaign manager?"

Siever was silent for a minute.

"There might be some powerful unpleasant developments from that sort of lying," he mused. "Some of the opposition down there at Sacramento would twist that into a boomerang against Engstrom if they got hold of it. But I guess we'll have to risk it. It'll be as you say, ma'am."

"Thank you, Mr. Siever!" Rommie impulsively placed both her hands in his. "Now I'm happy."

So they parted.

Rommie started to walk to the garage on South Main Street, where she had left her runabout; but when she passed through Courthouse Square she was stopped at the farther side by a dense crowd and a tangle of wagons. Over the heads of those nearest her she could see a gray campaign hat and the gleaming tip of a bayonet; other campaign hats and shimmering points of steel hedged off the line of the street. From somewhere beyond sight sounded the solemn, slow, measured numbers of a

funeral march in brass music; the muffled drum grumbled in the silences its insistent monotone of woe. Not a movement in the crowd; not a whisper!

Down from the skating rink through the aisle hedged off by the rifles of the militiamen—there not to pay honor, but to prevent disorder—came the funeral cortège. Old Gus Stollberg, the berry farmer; Pedro Villaconda, the hog rancher; Tony Castillo, who made tamales; Olaf Stridenberg, the blacksmith—they and the others who had died in the flux of mob madness were going out to the little red dirt cemetery west of town. Glorified on their last journey were these humble ones. German, Portuguese, Mexican, Norwegian; each went to the end of his pilgrimage under a flag of Stars and Stripes, common denominator of the republic.

When the funeral was over the organization meeting of the Grangers' Alliance, adjourned before by the rush to the jail, was continued in Kingsley's Opera House. None but ranch owners and ranch foremen were admitted. Engstrom, presiding as temporary chairman, refrained from any allusion to the events that had followed the disruption of the former meeting or to the day's spectacle of public grief. The soberness of the men who gathered there—red-faced, sun-baked men of the soil—plainly denied any success to a harrying of passions. All came bent on a purpose and in deadly earnest.

Organization was perfected. Engstrom was chosen president of the local branch by acclamation; committees were appointed. A resolution was read and passed without debate. It was:

"Resolved, That we, as a body and as individuals, do now and at all times utterly condemn the practice of selling or leasing land to Japanese in this vicinity; and be it further

"Resolved, That we will not sell or lease at any time any of our real property to one of the Asiatic race."

Luke Siever asked the privilege of addressing the meeting, and Engstrom, puzzled at the organizer's departure from his custom of self-effacement, waved him to the stage. Siever came to his point directly:

"Members of the Grangers' Alliance, I am not a citizen of Tehama County, and I don't want anybody here to believe I'm trying to mix in your politics. But I've got an announcement to make, and I think you ought to hear it.

"John Engstrom, who's just been made president of your Alliance branch, has consented to enter the primaries as Democratic and Grangers' Alliance candidate for the assembly, pledged to work for the top limit of protection against the Japs. You know him better than I, and I guess you know what John Engstrom's pledge is worth."

Siever turned and extended both his hands to Engstrom. There was not a sound from the crowded seats; not a cheer. But of a sudden a big man in a flapping duster jumped from his chair and hurried down the aisle to raise his red paw to Engstrom. Instantly others were in the aisles. A rough line was formed. It moved jerkily down toward the place where Engstrom stooped to grip hands. The editor's face was flushed; in his eyes stood tears—of pride, of deep exaltation.

"God bless you, John Engstrom!" said one. "We know you'll do the right, Johnny," called another.

So there in Kingsley's Opera House that hour pledges were given and taken—pledge of faith by near three hundred; pledge of service by one.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIGN AT THE CROSSROADS.

Sacramento lay under the whips of a January rain—the scouring, persistent downpour of a California winter.

The flat, unlovely town sprawling under the levee and menaced by the yellow floods of the river whose name it bears, appeared to be some sort of monstrous aquatic growth gathered on the face of a backwater slough. To John Engstrom, looking out over the roofs from his window in the Golden Eagle Hotel, its aspect was depressingly sad. Only one feature of the prospect lightened the drab monotony of the dripping town, and to that his eye constantly reverted: the dull-glowing gold dome of the capitol rising above the fernlike hedge of giant date palms in its surrounding park.

The capitol, seat of law! Under that high dome lay the halls of the lawmakers, the whole complex machinery created and set in motion by a people for the governance of their commonwealth and of that machinery he was now a part; he was the Honorable John Engstrom, assemblyman from the thirty-fifth district. Duly sworn, recognized by the law as a representative of the people of Tehama County, endowed with full power to initiate or approve legislation, here was he, ready to fulfill the pledges he had made when he bid for the suffrages of the Tehama voters.

Engstrom felt his responsibility as keenly as a surgeon who has a life in his hands. During the campaign of a few months past, when hot days were spent coursing from ranch to ranch and stifling night saw him under smoky lamps in some country schoolhouse with a close circle of rough men before him, his oft-reiterated promise had been: "Send me to Sacramento as your assemblyman and I will work with all my might to rid your land of the Jap invaders." He had won on that plea alone, so Engstrom felt; he was so simple a man that he took no count of the part personality had played in his triumph.

Nor had he been puffed up with pride at the reputation that came with him to Sacramento. Notice rarely accorded a green assemblyman had been given him by some of the old war horses of the lower chamber in the first week of the session; representatives from the southern citrus counties had gone out of their way to shake his hand; the Democratic floor leader had even introduced himself on the day of the new assembly's organization with a hearty, "I've heard a good deal about you, Mr. Engstrom." The *Annals,* organ of the pro-Japanese sentiment, had not overlooked him; it recalled editorially that "John Engstrom, the sand-lotter, responsible for the recent Red Buttes affair, has been sent to Sacramento on the strength of his incendiary principles of race hatred."

What Engstrom did not know was that much of the apparently spontaneous good will evidenced by the older members was the inspiration of Luke Siever. The Alliance organizer, back in his recognized place in the lobby with the convening of the legislature, had commenced with the very day of the assembly's organizing a consistent grooming of the country editor for place and power. Shrewd intelligence and long experience in the cloakrooms of the capitol both prompted him to pick John Engstrom as the man potentially fitted for Luke Siever's purposes. "Rub off the rawness; put him right, and he's a *comer!*" was the burden of many a whispered Siever tip.

On this day of great rain Engstrom was waiting in his room the call to a caucus of the Alliance members of the assembly. The legislature had been in session a week.

It was the voice of Siever over the telephone that summoned him downstairs to the "poker room." There in a secluded backwater of the lobby's babel and confusion was a heavily curtained room at the far end of a corridor, entrance into which could be obtained

only after a masonic formula of rappings. In it he found a dozen assemblymen, Siever and one other—a stranger who wore a city dignity. They sat about a circular green baize table and dropped their cigar ashes into the "kitty" slot in the table's center. Most of the assemblymen Engstrom knew: Hawley, from Tulare; King, from Yolo; Haskins, from Butte; like himself men from the ranching districts. The stranger who sat by Siever's side was introduced as "ex-Attorney General Webster, from San Francisco; a sharp on international law."

Siever, with his easy assurance, acted as chairman of the caucus; none questioned his right.

"It's up to us to-day to frame the first and hottest of the assembly anti-Jap bills," Siever announced, by way of opening the caucus. "We've got an understanding with our crowd in the senate that they won't start anything there until they see how our assembly bills get through committee. The big fight on all Jap business is going to come up in the assembly, anyway; the San Francisco fair people and the Los Angeles crowd concede us a senate majority, but they're lining up a big vote to hammer all Jap bills in the lower chamber. They're framing to prevent a two-thirds vote over the governor's veto if it comes to that; but the governor"—Siever's heavy eyebrows came down in a humorous wink—"the governor won't veto. Now, gents, let's get busy and remember Mr. Webster, here, is going to put the brakes on anything that won't stand up under treaty obligations."

So began the conference and the framing of the bill. The land; that's where they must hit the Japs first, so it was agreed. Stop the acquisition of land by the yellow men, sweep away their power even to lease, and they would cease to drive the whites out of their holdings.

First one and then another of the group about the baize table offered suggestions, recalled passages and provisions in former bills which had failed of enactment, referred to this and that act of a president blocking anti-Japanese legislation. Treaties were discussed and the hidden entanglements of national and State politics: how the Democratic president stood on the issue of State's rights; what might be his relations with the Bull Moose governor in the event of a radical land law bidding fair to pass the legislature; how could the Bull Moose governor square himself with the assertively pro-Japanese ex-president who was at the head of his party? Siever took a part in the discussion, launching now and then a shrewd analysis of the national and international situation, summing up the strength or weakness of a proposition in a terse sentence. The former attorney general nodded gravely when this and that point was made, but did not speak.

As for Engstrom he felt a mortifying ineptitude. He was barred from discussion by his ignorance of everything save the condition for which a remedy was being devised. Nothing of treaties, nothing of the principles of international comity, of presidential influence and national policy was his to know. All that was far—so far from life and experience in Tehama County. The only thing he could be certain about was that the Japanese must go; that was a matter of unreasoning conviction. He had never before been forced to face the problem of providing their expulsion. Glibly he had promised his constituents to drive the invaders out, yet now, so he suddenly realized, he found himself incompetent for the task at the very outset.

At the first revelation of his weakness came sudden despair and the sense of a trust betrayed under false pretense; but the old Crusader zeal was

strong to save. He drove himself to grasp the fundamentals of all this complicated issue. Bit by bit the whole fabric of law, politics, and diplomacy reared a structure of comprehension in his mind. Dimly he began to realize that there was a world outside of Tehama County—even beyond the boundaries of California; a world from whose complex balances of advantage and compensation California and Tehama County could not hold aloof.

The day wore on. Sandwiches and beer were brought into the poker room. Tentative drafts on scraps of paper littered the floor. Finally Siever, who had scrupulously allowed each of the caucus members to wear himself out with schemes and projects that would not stand the test of legality, roused the assemblymen with an announcement:

"Gents, of course Mr. Webster, here, and myself do not want to appear to butt in on your deliberations; but now that you seem to have banged up against a stone wall, perhaps you'd like to hear a little recommendation Mr. Webster has. It's a hundred per cent legal proof. Mr. Webster——"

The "sharp on international law" cleared his throat with a noisy, professional air, and began:

"Gentlemen, there's a way you can frame this law which doesn't leave Japan a leg to stand on; makes her concur in it, as a matter of fact. The Root-Takahira treaty of 1911 secures to the Japanese the right to lease and occupy land for residential and business purposes; but it doesn't cover the owning or leasing of lands for agricultural purposes. *Doesn't say a word about agricultural lands!* All right! Now frame a law which confirms the right of aliens eligible to citizenship to acquire property to the same extent as citizens, and then affirms the right of all other aliens not included in the first category to acquire property under the limitations of any treaty that may be existing between the United States and their home government.

"You see? In that way you don't have to prohibit the Japanese directly because of his ineligibility to citizenship—a thing which sticks in the crop of the Japanese government. Instead you allow him just as much privilege as his own treaty stipulates, and no more. If he is disqualified from holding land in California it is because Takahira signed away that right. Your law will not be in conflict with treaty obligations. Japan cannot say you are discriminating against her citizens when you go no farther than the treaty obligation Japan herself entered into. I think, gentlemen, that is the way out of your difficulties."

Mr. Webster smiled dryly and once more retired into himself. Siever, casting an appraising eye about the table, saw the light of comprehension kindle in the eyes of the assemblymen, heard their suppressed exclamations. There was an excited buzzing about the board. Half a dozen reached for paper and began to scribble drafts. Like a father the Grangers' Alliance organizer beamed upon them.

Two hours later the ex-attorney general carefully and critically reviewed the joint compilation of "An Act Relating to the Rights, Powers, and Disabilities of Aliens With Respect to Property in This State." He pronounced it armorproof against attack either by Federal executive or judiciary—a perfect law.

There was an ecstatic moment of handshaking about the poker table. Some rose to get their hats.

"Hold on there!" Siever exclaimed. "Before we go, just whose bill is this; who's going to introduce it?"

There was a laugh at that. Somebody proposed that inasmuch as at least fourteen men had a hand in framing it they leave the authorship to lot. It was

agreed. John Engstrom drew out of Siever's battered black Fedora the wisp of paper with the designating mark. His face burned red when he saw how the lottery had used him; his heart leaped to the cast of fate.

"H'ray for the Engstrom Bill!" one shouted, and the cry was taken up. Whole-heartedly the others crowded around him to congratulate, and then, with Engstrom in the center, the caucus forsook the poker room and advanced to the bar, there to sit in executive session upon serious consideration of malt and spirituous derivatives.

Two days later Engstrom introduced the bill. The interim he had spent in furious assimilation of information anent the Japanese question in every phase. Two nights he sat up with a pot of black coffee at his elbow, digesting reports of Federal immigration commissions, census figures on the distribution and occupation of Japanese in California, senate and assembly journals detailing the progress of former anti-Japanese legislation. All these data Luke Siever brought him, and hours the Alliance organizer spent in Engstrom's room, puffing at weedy cigars and grooming him to his task like a tutor working over a willing student. On the second night Engstrom prepared an outline of the speech he was to make upon the submission of the bill, and in the small hours of the morning he strode nervously back and forth before his bed, conning his argument, memorizing the most salient data he had studied.

"It's all fixed," Siever assured him, as they walked to the capitol on the fateful morning. "Instead of presenting written request for permission to enter your bill, make the request orally as soon as the new order of business is announced; then pull your speech. The speaker'll recognize you and stand by you when the opposition begins to roar."

An hour later Assemblyman Engstrom of the thirty-fifth found himself standing by his desk and speaking. The protests and points of order shouted by several colleagues from the opposite side of the floor had been pounded down by the speaker's gavel. The chamber was hushed. Everybody in it knew that this new member down from the Sacramento Valley was the one chosen to launch the fight on the Japanese. Reporters for the city papers and the Associated Press were hurriedly scribbling:

FLASH: Engstrom, leader Red Buttes anti-Jap riot, introduces land bill assembly.

He had begun to speak according to well-memorized rote, following the rounded periods and carefully constructed arguments he had prepared. But the objections of the opposition rattled him, and in the minute the speaker was restoring order and clearing the way for him, Engstrom forgot everything of the formal appeal; statistics, reports, quotations from the speeches of former legislators—all were wiped clean from his mind. But he did not hesitate. Instead his tongue moved without his volition; speech crowded to his lips too fast for enunciation. Crude, gripping eloquence!

He told the story of old Gus Stollberg, the berry farmer, driven to the wall by the competition of the Japanese small fruit gardener; how Gus had exploded: "Der Chaps, dey eats mein strawperries until mein family don'd half efen bread to eat!" He recited the struggle Bruce Lees had made to stem the tide of Shimasuki's men on two sides of his prune ranch; Lees had been able to harvest his last prune crop, the speaker said, only because of white laborers the Grangers' Alliance had sent from the idle oil fields in the San Joaquin Valley. Dramatically he narrated the conversation that had passed between Lees and Shimasuki, the boss of

Japtown, when the latter had threatened the extinction of Los Pinos Rancho unless his terms were met. Then he reverted to the night of the riot in Red Buttes.

"You may condemn the men of that mob," he called, in a great voice, "even as they have been condemned from Tokyo to Cape Cod! You may consider me a dangerous sand-lotter—a bloodthirsty agitator—even as I have been branded from one end of the country to the other! But that will not avail to alter the conditions which made that night of madness inevitable. As long as those conditions remain, other acts of violence such as that will occur in other towns of this State, and other white men will be driven to commit murder and be murdered. Who dares say when or where?

"Just so long as the white men in this State are forced either to live side by side with the yellow men of Japan or give up the ground they own, every ranching county of California will be a dynamite magazine, and just so long will 'dangerous sand-lotters' continue to voice the wrath of the people!"

Engstrom had lifted himself to his toes. His thin, nervous face was afire with passion; the wispy forelock of his straw-colored hair hung over his eyes.

"Men of the Fortieth California Legislature, if you do not free the land of the invaders now—at this session—it will be too late! They will own the State!"

He stopped abruptly and walked down the aisle to hand the manuscript of his bill to the clerk. He passed under a clatter of applause. Many rose from their seats to grip his hand or pat him on the back. The derisive yells of the opposition were pounded down by Democratic palms and feet. Engstrom's triumph was emphatic.

Siever met him in the cloakroom at the noon recess.

"By criminy, Engstrom," he exploded, "if I'd known you were going to pull that old red-headed stuff I'd 'a' moved heaven and earth to keep you off the floor! But it took! It searched 'em out for fair! Looks now as if you'd stumbled onto the right keynote for the fight this session—rip-roarin', no-compromise stuff!"

Telegraph and cable carried part of Engstrom's speech and the full text of the Engstrom Bill through all the country and under seas to Japan. It was a big news feature; papers in Chicago, New York, and Washington "played" it. Also, falling into the biased deceit that the *Annals* had compounded at the time of the Red Buttes riot, the papers appended to the name of John Engstrom such identifying tags as "the well-known agitator," or "a leading figure in the recent sensational anti-Japanese riot at Red Buttes." That the man known on the coast as one of the instigators of that serious affair should be the first to launch a measure against the Japanese in the California legislature was a circumstance for grave editorial apprehension in more than one quarter. John Engstrom and the people of his ilk in California were compounding an international felony, some Eastern critics declared. Japan was being doubly insulted: by the text of the bill and the character of its author. This act of an agitator at Sacramento but imposed heavier strain on the already delicate relations between the two powers.

None of this comment, save that seasoned by invective in the *Annals*, came to Engstrom. He was not even curious to read the opinion of the Eastern press; the San Francisco organ's mouthings had ceased to trouble him. He knew that the designating mark he had drawn from Luke Siever's old Fedora in the poker room of the Golden Eagle and the white-hot draft from his passions he had poured forth on the floor of the assembly chamber had combined to exalt him to leadership of the war

against the Japanese, and he gloried in that distinction. Men of his party pledged by their Alliance membership to push through the radical bills came to him to be directed. Members of the judiciary committee, to which his bill had been forwarded, sought him to learn of the unassailable legality of the measure. Even a logroller for the San Francisco fair crowd cautiously sounded him as to his acceptance of an amendment which would take some of the sting out of the bill. All the prerogatives of leadership were his—and Luke Siever was the faithful prompter behind the curtain.

Three days after the introduction of the Engstrom Bill in the assembly the streets of Sacramento suddenly became clamorous, at a quiet afternoon hour, with the shouts of the newsboys:

"Extra-a-a-ah! Secretary of state coming to Sacramento! Extra-a-a-ah!"

Men in the streets, legislators hurrying down from the capitol, read the news:

The president has ordered the secretary of state to go to Sacramento immediately, and use his persuasion to prevent the passage of the Engstrom Bill and all similar measures against the Japanese. He left Washington quietly on the six-o'clock train this evening, and is now rushing across the continent in the hope that he may arrive at the California capital in time to prevent what may be the provoking of a grave international crisis.

It was said by a high authority at the capitol to-day that the present relations between Japan and the United States are such that the pasage of the Engstrom Bill by the California legislature would prove nothing short of calamitous. The imminent fall of the Japanese ministry, following the demonstration against it Sunday because of its failure to press the Red Buttes incident, presages the accession of a jingoistic set of advisers about the throne of the emperor. The most conservative members of the presidential family in Washington do not hesitate to say that the passage of the Engstrom Bill would insure the fall of the present ministry in Tokyo and a dangerous change of policy on the part of the Japanese government.

Engstrom, in his room at the hotel that night, read and reread this dispatch. He felt a little appalled by it; not at the unveiled hint of possible war, but at the mere physical appearance of his name there in this glib revelation of the secrets of two chancellories.

Two days later the bill was reported favorably out of the judiciary committee as legally infallible in its opinion. Engstrom and the Alliance members were for pushing it immediately through its readings to a vote; but here the governor lent his weight to the minority in opposition, counseling delay as a courtesy to the national administration and the secretary of state. The bill rested on its first reading.

The secretary of state arrived. He did not come frowning, nor wearing a cold pose of dignity; but smiling and with a genial air of fellowship which left no gulf between the dean of a president's official family and the doorkeeper of the assembly chamber. His attitude was that of one who came to learn some new things. He was not primed and cocked with official reprobation; instead he was ready and sympathetic for an exposition of the State's problem. Would the members of the assembly be good enough to allow him to sit on the floor and listen to the debates on the Engstrom Bill? In that way he could best inform himself.

Through some impulse which he could not analyze, Engstrom avoided meeting the secretary; he was not one of the many who crowded around the big man from Washington to introduce themselves and show courtesy. Before the prospect of facing this master politician who had been hurried to Sacramento to nip the fruition of hopes which were to him a religion, the member from the thirty-fifth felt a vague hostility, also a recurrence of that helpless sense of ineptitude which had assailed him at the caucus in the poker room. Here was this great statesman, so learned in the lore of politics, so famil-

iar with the cogs and cams of that government back there in Washington; what chance had he, John Engstrom, in argument with such a one, if argument should arise? He'd spring something about the interests of the United States—of that jumbled country called the East; that's what he'd do. He'd say California was mighty headstrong on this Jap question, and didn't consider the interests of the East, or something like that. What did the secretary know about the Jap situation, anyway; in Tehama County, for instance?

By jamming through a resolution setting aside the order of assembly procedure, and putting the Engstrom Bill through its second and third reading, the anti-Japanese forces brought final debate on the measure the second day after the secretary's arrival. The resolution carried forty-three to thirty-five; a final test of strength. Then came the last desperate efforts of the opposition to stay the inevitable. A member from Los Angeles offered an amendment—a cleverly phrased clause of less than a dozen words which seemed innocuous, but which drew a heavy fire from the intrenched majority.

Engstrom, his wits sharpened to preternatural keenness by the exigencies of the struggle's last hours, was constantly on his feet to combat the strategy of his opponents with his old, insistent call: "No temporizing! No delay!" He was conscious at these times that the eyes of the secretary of state were upon him; that the big man who sat by the speaker was leaning forward as if to study him intently. This scrutiny disconcerted him in his secret soul, but did not blunt his activity. If this secretary of state, Engstrom told himself with grim satisfaction, wanted to see a dangerous sand-lotter in action, now was his chance!

The hour for adjournment came. One of the majority, who had been in consultation with the speaker, moved that as a courtesy to the secretary of state, who had asked it, the assembly adjourn until the morning instead of continuing in night session. The motion was carried by the cocksure proponents of the bill.

Engstrom saw the speaker beckoning to him when the members were rising to go to the cloakroom. He went to the high desk.

"Mr. Engstrom," said the speaker, "the secretary of state wants to meet you. He says you are one of the few he has not yet been introduced to."

Engstrom, a bit flustered, rebellious, was conscious of a hearty grip on his hand. The big man was smiling into his eyes as he spoke:

"Mr. Engstrom, back in Washington they paint you as another Dennis Kearney, with a bomb in one hand and a torch in the other. I'm glad to tell you, sir, that your portrait has been overdrawn."

The father of the Engstrom Bill stuttered something in reply. The bashfulness of a schoolgirl overcame him.

"I wish to ask you as a particular favor—a very particular favor—if you will come to see me to-night," the secretary continued. He added hastily: "Or I can come to you; it makes no difference."

Engstrom was won by this ingenuous emendation. A secretary of state willing to climb up to his two-dollar room in the Golden Eagle!

"I'll call on you—and be glad, Mr. Secretary," he said.

It was nine o'clock when Engstrom presented himself at a suite of rooms where the secretary lodged. The great man himself welcomed him at the door and led him into a sitting room which had been modified to serve the uses of an office. A small desk was there; behind it a filing cabinet and a big map of the United States which covered more than a yard of wall space. The secretary cordially waved Engstrom to

a chair, drew another close to it, and sat down. His ready smile—a smile which seemed to embrace the brotherhood of mankind—disarmed Engstrom of his nervousness and shamed the rebellious spirit of caution he had brought with him.

"Mr. Engstrom," said the secretary, "I have been trying to learn the intimate side of the Japanese question since I came to Sacramento, and I have to rely upon keen, observant men like yourself for my information. Will you not tell me what the problem is in your district—the thirty-fifth, I believe? Tell me everything."

The query was so wide of what Engstrom had steeled himself to combat that for an instant he was nonplused. Here was no brusque question as to why he hated the Japanese, or what business he had to legislate against them; no command to desist from his campaign. After he had recovered from his surprise he eagerly followed the secretary's bidding. Consciously striving to make a dispassionate statement, he detailed the circumstances of the economic confusion that had resulted from the invasion of the yellow men; cited instances of the race prejudice of the whites being capitalized by the clever Japanese; recalled the case of Bruce Lees in point when explaining how Shimasuki rendered one ranch uninhabitable to sensitive whites by the simple process of moving yellow men into an adjoining ranch. Through all Engstrom's earnest exposition the secretary sat mute, nodding his head occasionally when a point was driven home.

Before he knew it Engstrom was narrating the incidents that led to the night of murder in Red Buttes. He told the story breathlessly, dramatically, emphasizing the point that mere suspicion that Japanese had tried to defeat the ends of law had been sufficient to fire the minds of five hundred men with fury, so hot was their resentment. Unconsciously, as he gave the story of the organization meeting of the ranchers in Kingsley's Opera House, and of the subsequent swift descent of tragedy, Engstrom revealed his own innocence of the charge of incendiarism the *Annals* had first lodged against him. The secretary heard him through without comment.

"How many Japanese are there in California?" he asked.

"About fifty-eight thousand," Engstrom answered.

"In a population of two million, three hundred thousand odd?" The face of the president's emissary was serious; no controversial gleam was in his eyes. "Hum-m; that would make the Japanese comprise about two and a half per cent of the whole. And your district, Mr. Engstrom—the thirty-fifth; what is its population?"

"Oh, about thirty-two hundred whites," he answered, puzzled at the drift of the secretary's questioning. The latter was quiet for several minutes; his finger tips were at his lips, and his eyelids were drooped in thought. Suddenly he rose and strode over to where the map hung. He beckoned Engstrom to follow.

"You have never been East, Mr. Engstrom?" He put the question more in the form of a statement.

"Never east of Paradise Valley, Nevada," the member from the thirty-fifth answered, with a slight smile. The secretary spoke on as he groped with his finger in the maze of lettering and divisional lines which was New England on the map:

"Well, I have in mind a little town up here in New Hampshire of about the same population as your district, Mr. Engstrom. It's a sweet old town—a sleepy old town—nothing like your hustling, up-to-the-minute towns out here on the coast. I don't believe a new building has gone up in this little town since the Civil War, it's so sleepy

and contented. Life runs very slowly, but very beautifully, in this old town. There are three old maiden ladies there on Meeting Street, I remember, and when their tabby cat sat on some fly-paper—— But, pshaw; I wasn't thinking so much of that story as I was of the big responsibility that's going to settle on this quiet old place. I——"

The secretary seemed to be musing, wholly oblivious to the presence of his visitor.

"Responsibility?" echoed Engstrom, after a deferential wait for the other to continue.

"Yes, responsibility." The secretary turned to face Engstrom, in his eyes a look of deep solemnity. "Responsibility for the fifty-eight thousand Japanese you two million people of California do not like."

"Why, I don't see where they have any responsibility," Engstrom began, with a little bluster. "They probably never saw a Jap, and this is a State issue with us, you know."

"No, the people in this little New Hampshire town probably never saw a Japanese," the other murmured, and he turned again to the map. This time his finger dropped down among the Gulf States, and rested on a tiny dot in Alabama.

"And here is another fine old town I know," he said, his voice rich with tenderness. "They've worked hard down there to wipe away the ravages of a great war. Their fine men have got right down to the soil and *grubbed* to rebuild the prosperity that was swept away by the Great Mistake, and now, after fifty years, they are just beginning to bring in the harvest. This new responsibility will go mighty hard with these fine Americans—coming—just at this time."

Engstrom was whipping his mind to comprehend the secretary's meaning. A town in New Hampshire—another in Alabama—responsibility!

"I'm afraid I do not follow you, Mr. Secretary," he confessed. "Why—responsibility for them?"

"Because, Mr. Engstrom, the fine people of these two towns are citizens of the United States," the other answered, his eyes steadily on the younger man's. "Because New Hampshire and Alabama are parts of the United States, like California—bound in honor by whatever California may do, even to the last extremity—even to—war, Mr. Engstrom."

Those last words were voiced in almost a whisper. The secretary's broad, mobile face was drawn tensely. A forefinger rising and falling punctuated each faltering word.

"Come and sit down again, Mr. Engstrom, and I'll tell you what not a dozen men in this country know about—a dreadful—possibility."

What the secretary of state told the member of the California legislature there in that quiet room probably never will become common property until some historian many years hence gains access to state papers whose secrets have been made innocuous by time and changed circumstance. Perhaps he led this raw countryman to the edge of an angry, boiling pitch pot and allowed him to see where the young blood of the nation would be poured to quench insatiable fires. Perhaps he revealed facts at which, were they known, the whole republic would shudder: facts of unpreparedness for a crisis, of the secret determination of other powers to launch themselves at the republic's throat once she was engaged in struggle.

A whole ugly page of secret diplomacy the secretary uncovered for Engstrom's reading. He did it with a seriousness of deep conviction—with honest belief in the truth of what he revealed. Engstrom, dumfounded, utterly beyond the hand lines of his own narrow experience, groped for something

to hold to; it seemed that he stood alone in the face of some unbelievable cataclysm, and this hand lay on a lever which, somehow, would release its forces.

"Now do you understand the responsibility I referred to, Mr. Engstrom?" the secretary was saying. "Do you see how the weight of California's displeasure at the presence of a few thousand yellow men is going to bear upon these little towns—thousands of little towns all over the country? Because California is a part of the great republic, and her will is binding upon every other division of that republic, young men in New Hampshire, in Alabama, in little Delaware—young men who may never have seen a Japanese, as you suggest, or who may not even know that you in California do not like the Japanese—these young men may be called upon to give up their lives in the defense of the country. Isn't it a glorious thing to know that they will do it? Doesn't it make you feel proud that you are a citizen, not of California alone, but of the United States?"

Engstrom sat with his hands knotted in his lap. He could not bring himself to meet the secretary's eye.

"One of the tests of the stability of our government of States," the mellow voice of the secretary ran on, "is just that which the vote in the assembly tomorrow will impose: loyalty of the whole to a part. A foreign observer might say, 'Just because a small majority of the people of California protest against the holding of less than half of one per cent of the State's area by Japanese, will the ninety millions of citizens outside of California be bound by the results of that protest? Absurd!'

"'No, not absurd,' I answer. 'Not absurd, but glorious; for it will be a wonderful demonstration of the unselfishness of our people; it will prove that the nation is put above the State in their affections."

Engstrom, sitting in a torture, heard the voice go on; heard how a president and his advisers, working for the good of California as well as for the whole country, were driving the slow wheels of diplomacy to accomplish the end which he and his associates in the assembly would do roughly and without heed to consequences; heard a new story of the responsibility of a nation to other nations, and of the cautious process of give-and-take between nations. Always there ran through the secretary's discourse one clear, insistent note: love of country—the whole country.

In the end he rose to go. The secretary went with him to the door and there gave his hand a mighty shake. No word passed between them.

CHAPTER VII.

A CITIZEN OF THE REPUBLIC.

That night, alone in his room, John Engstrom fought a bitter fight.

It was a night of visions.

First appeared to him a mist of blossoming prunes, and against the whiteness stood Romola Lees, virginal in her beauty. In her eyes lay a great love and a great confidence. She came to him, took his hands in hers, gave her lips to him, and said: "John, be our leader; go to Sacramento and fight for us—for our land. It is your duty."

Old Bruce Lees stood there, then, outlined against the promise of the harvest's gold, all about him the glory of his life's struggle. The rugged old rancher had his arm raised as if to ward a blow, and under it he looked furtively through the haze of blossoms to catch a glimpse of the cunning, patient enemy who was inexorably closing in upon him to wrest from him the fruit of the harvest.

Then the floor of Kingsley's Opera House, crowded with ranchers—big men of the soil, workers under the sun.

They rose from their seats, formed a straggling line, and pushed to the stage, their hands raised high to grip his, red faces wreathed with smiles of confidence. "God bless you, John Engstrom! We know you'll do right by us!"

His people, these! The girl of his heart, the men of his land. They trusted him. In him their great hope of deliverance was imposed. They had his pledge, and to them that pledge was as sacred as the honor of him who gave it.

The walls of the room were rolled back, and instead of the blackness of night the blue-black of a heaving sea was there. Smudges of smoke showed beyond the dim horizon line, then two gray fleets rose out of the waters, approached, engaged in combat. All the frescoes of hell were hurled against the sky as men died under fiendish ingenuity of killing. The heaving sea swallowed up flaming gray shapes, one by one.

Yes, and there came, too, visions of little villages, in New Hampshire, in Alabama; of young men called away from the plow, the factory, and the office desk to shoulder a gun. On the faces of these as they marched from their homes under a flag was written the one universal question: "Why?"

These young men with guns on their shoulders and the men whom the ocean swallowed; who were they? Citizens of the United States who must fight because John Engstrom and his people of a valley in California do not like the Japanese; because fifty-eight thousand people in a remote State are hateful in the eyes of most of the other two million.

"It will be a wonderful demonstration of the unselfishness of our people!"

The member from the thirty-fifth district covered his eyes to shut out this accusing picture of the marching young men.

"But my pledges—my pledges!" he groaned. "My people—what will they think!"

My people! Who were these that worked the guns on the grim ships, these that left their villages under the flag—men of that dim, far-away East and South? Who if not his people! What would *they* think of John Engstrom of Red Buttes who, by a word, launched them into the maelstrom of war? Did they hold no pledges from John Engstrom?

The night sped, and in that darkened room a man was born again. John Engstrom, sand-lotter, Jap hater, champion of Tehama County, died. John Engstrom, citizen of the republic, lived.

They were voting in the assembly upon the Engstrom Bill. Floor and galleries were packed. A reënforced bank of reporters in the press circle sent bulletins by messenger out to the wires, specially strung in the lobby to meet the circumstance. The secretary of state sat under the canopy next the speaker, the pendant folds of the Stars and Stripes almost touching his head. Five of the seventy-five names on the roll call had already been passed.

"Mr. Engstrom!" the clerk called.

The member from the thirty-fifth rose in his seat. His thin face was very pale; his lips were drawn into a tight line.

"Point of privilege, Mr. Speaker," he said. "May I explain my vote?"

A questioning murmur swept through the chamber. Men craned their necks over the gallery rail to see his face. The speaker nodded.

"Members of the Fortieth Assembly," Engstrom began, in a steady voice, his eyes fixed unswervingly upon the face of the secretary of state. "You are called upon to-day to vote upon a bill which bears my name and which disqualifies Japanese of California from

holding land. For several years the ideas incorporated in this bill were my ideals, and the spirit in which this bill was drawn was my religion. I came to this assembly upon my solemn pledge that I would work to the last to put such a bill on the statute books of this State.

"Gentlemen of the assembly, I was wrong. I need not tell you what a struggle it has been for me to acknowledge that I was wrong, nor what the consequences of my vote this day will be—to me personally.

"But, gentlemen, as God sees me, I am convinced that this bill was conceived in selfishness, that it is un-American in spirit, and disloyal to the republic. I believe that the passage of this bill will bring our country to the brink of a grave peril—may even put the nation face to face with war. I wish I could bring you all to as strong a belief in this as I hold!

"California has not the right, in the face of God nor man, to force this peril upon the country.

"Mr. Speaker, I vote 'No' on this bill."

Engstrom sat down. An angry roar arose from seats all about him. Men whirled in their chairs to scowl or shout insults at him. Some left their seats and hurried to his side, whispering pleadingly in his ear. Some of the opposition ran over to pat his back.

Bang! sounded the speaker's gavel.

"Mr. Clerk, continue to call the roll!"

Engstrom sat motionless, his eyes straight ahead of him to bear upon the big figure of the secretary under the pendant folds of the flag. The secretary met his glance with one full of kindliness. The roll proceeded to its end, and a hush fell over the chamber. Then the clerk spoke:

"For the Engstrom Bill, ayes, thirty-four; against the Engstrom Bill, noes, forty-one."

"The Engstrom Bill is voted down," announced the speaker.

Every one jumped to his feet. The chamber was in confusion. Engstrom brushed his way down the aisle, ignoring a dozen attempts to stop him. Out in the cloakroom he found his hat, and was turning to pass out through the doors of the assembly chamber when Luke Siever sprang down the last short flight of steps from the visitors' gallery and intercepted him.

The Alliance organizer's eyes were wolfish against the dead white of his face.

"Have you anything to say to me, Engstrom? Any little explanation?"

The words hissed like water on hot coals.

"Nothing, Siever, except I'm glad God gave me strength to do my duty," Engstrom answered.

"Of course, you're a dead duck in the assembly right now!" the other snarled.

"That may be."

"And your girl—Romola Lees—who put up the money for your election, gave me all the money she had in the bank to back you in the campaign. Oh, you didn't know about that; did you? Well, *she's* goin' to think you're mighty sweet, *she* is!"

"Leave her out of your conversation, Siever!" Engstrom, very white, stepped closer to the lobbyist. His fists were doubled in quick anger.

"And Red Buttes—the folks up there'll be powerful glad to see you!" Siever leered wickedly, and humped his stooped shoulders. "A reception committee for yours!"

Engstrom looked out over the nodding fronds of the date palms for a minute before he replied. Then, his voice suddenly dropped as if under great fatigue:

"I'm going back to Red Buttes—now."

He strode away into the hot sunlight,

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN PANAMA FELT THE KEELS.

Two years later, on a searing midsummer afternoon, all Red Buttes was alive and stirring. Through the red dust of the country roads converging upon the town from Lassen and the coast mountains, from upriver and down south of the county seat where the vineyards stretched their miles of low green tents, crawled the wagons and autos of the ranchers, incoming. The hitching rings about Courthouse Square filled up rapidly, and big men in dusters eased themselves painfully from wagon seats, to flap their direct way through saloon doors, there to cut the red dirt in their throats with schooners of "steam beer." Up and down Main Street passed conversational eddies, whose single burden was the coming of the four-five train from the south. Men wore little cambric flags tucked in the bands of their hats; girls in white summer frocks had broad sashes of star-spangled tricolor hung over their shoulders.

From the end of the bridge straight to the railroad station, eight blocks away, strings of starched and shimmering flags made a fluted ceiling of color for Center Street. On every flagpole Old Glory hung limp in the breathless heat. The awnings of every store front were draped with fluffy ropes of red, white, and blue-cut tissue, and gaudy cardboard shields of the State were tacked on awning posts. All the color and the bustle and the hectic flux of a Fourth of July gala was there.

Down the steps of Odd Fellows' Hall trooped important-appearing citizens wearing broad gold and purple badges. These were stamped "Welcoming Committee—Tehama County White Labor Getters." The committeemen did a lot of running to and fro, bouncing to telephones and bawling to hackmen. Finally, an hour before train time, the Red Buttes Excelsior Band paraded up from the skating rink, took position in front of Odd Fellows' Hall, and made the still air pulse with the umpah-umpah of a popular quickstep.

While all Main Street rushed down to the lure of the music, the committee members stepped into the open hacks that waited across the street. A cheer, and around the post-office corner rode a big, smiling man on a white horse —Sheriff Lee Blount. A parade marshal's flaring sash crossed his huge barrel of a chest, and in the band of his hard glazed hat he had, with boyish prankishness, stuck a rooster's feather. His face was flaming red. With a free-handed gesture he acknowledged the cheers of the crowd, brought his horse to a position in front of the drum-major and yelled: "Let 'er go!" So the procession—marshal, band, committeemen's hacks, and citizens in extempore formation of column—moved down to the station.

After a wait, the train from San Francisco trundled to a stop. It was a longer train than usual; three shabby coaches just back of the baggage cars had increased its length. Before the dusty engine came panting to a halt the band whirled into the "Star-Spangled Banner," and up and down the length of the platform, where there was not foot room for even a dog, a whirlwind of color marked the frantic waving of hundreds of flags. Out on the platform of the nearest dilapidated day coach stepped a figure, whose appearance put even a madder pulse into the waving flags and interrupted the singing of the school children with a sudden yell. It was John Engstrom.

He stood for a minute, looking down at the block of upturned faces, his own alight with a great joy; then he turned and lifted in his arms the outlandish figure of a little girl. Her garb was all gaudy colors, her black head was bound in a red-and-green handkerchief,

under which round, black eyes showed wide in fear. A big, white card with a number on it was pinned just beneath her chin. Engstrom held her up at arm's length, as if exhibiting a prize to his townspeople, then passed her down to hands that stretched for her at the car steps.

Out of the doors of the coaches, then, crowded a motley three hundred, all tagged with numbered cards like so many consignments of freight. Big, swarthy men with brigands' mustachios staggered under rope-bound bundles and bulging valises of shoddy leather. Women, thick of body, full-bosomed, capable mothers of a strong breed, hesitated on the car steps and looked out upon the white faces and the tossing flags with half smiles of shyness and gratefulness. They had children tucked under arms—and ponderous bundles bound in handkerchiefs. The stamp of the Old World was strong on all the vagabond crew. To the folk of Red Buttes they were strange creatures come from another planet; their kind had never been seen in all the West.

The welcoming committee worked like volunteer firemen at a hay fire. With smiles and understandable gestures of friendliness they separated the strangers from their baggage, herded them into rough formation behind the band, and then gave the word for the march. The immigrants, bewildered beyond all thought by the nature of their reception, and knowing only that they were in a land o' dreams, followed the band like cattle. All about them closed the populace of Red Buttes in a bodyguard of good-fellowship. The march was short. It led to the cottonwood grove over in the Western Addition; there the ultimate surprise of all lay on the redwood tables that stretched in a great square under the shade of the big trees.

A bull's-head bake it was. Cooks had been busy over the pits all day, and now they were hoisting whole dreadnaughts of steaming ribs and flotillas of three-inch tenderloins onto the cutting tables. Two Mexicans, a little apart, were stacking red-hot tamales, like so much kindling, on big wooden serving platters. A cook's helper circulated about the tables, dropping loaves of bread in brown mounds of invitation. The hot air was filled with a savory odor.

The immigrants, their eyes wide before this unbelievable miracle of bounty, were disposed in a block, then the Red Buttes folk began the battle of knives and forks. The beef, chickens, and the tamales disappeared by the hundred-pound bulk. Good red wine —the essence of the sun distilled in the red ground of Tehama—spouted from hundreds of bottles into tin cups, and was drained. The business of eating and drinking was all-consuming. When it had come to an end and folk sat back on their benches with satisfied sighs of repletion, Lee Blount rose in his place at the head of the tables and lifted a big paw for silence. His heavy voice growled and rumbled:

"Two years ago a man of our town came back here from Sacramento to face the dog-gondest proposition any man ever faced: his home town turned against him. That man knew he was right and his town was wrong, and he took what his own people gave him without a holler. You people sittin' here—I see you gettin' red in the neck when you remember the pannin' you handed out to that man. You pretty near broke him!"

Blount slammed one big fist into an open palm, and for an instant his eyes blazed anger. He bellowed on:

"And what did this man do—this man you'd tied the can to? What did he do but borrow money to go back to Washington and ask the secretary of the United States to show him how he

could help his people—you people sittin' here—to get rid of the Japs. The secretary told him he'd help, showed him how the canal was going to bring white labor from Europe to California, and says to him: 'Sonny, you run back to your little town and organize your people to grab the first shipload of immigrants that goes through Panama—and keep on grabbin' 'em until you've druv the last Jap out o' Tehama County.'

"Well, he did it! He came back here and asked you people to b'lieve in him once more. He worked like a hound, and—to-day we've got half the first shipload of white labor to come through the big ditch. Shimasuki and his pack is on the skids. California's saved for the white man!"

The sheriff paused and looked down to where Engstrom sat near him; saw the red that mounted to his sparse forelock.

"John Engstrom," Sheriff Blount commanded slowly and with authority, "*Honorable* John Engstrom, get up on your hind legs and talk to these folks!"

Engstrom did talk when the cheering had died—talked in his old style of impetuous eloquence. He told them of the magical thing the opening to navigation of the great Isthmian waterway would work for California, of which this first shipload of aliens, come to Red Buttes that day, was an earnest. He sketched a picture of what the California of five years thence would be, with white men working in every orchard and vineyard—men assimilable, strong in potential worth of citizenship under the liberty of a new land—and the yellow man of Japan forced back to his islands by the economic law of demand and supply from which there is no appeal. Greater than the laws of nations, more potent, even, than force of arms was this fifty-mile gash across the thin waist of a hemisphere away down there next the equator! Through it was coming even now the salvation of California—strong, expectant workers for her golden harvest!

The sun was dropping to the blue line of the coast mountains when Engstrom and one other started across the bridge in a little red runabout, their faces to the east and the road that led to Los Pinos Rancho. Romola Lees, who had become Romola Engstrom in the darkest hour of her lover's trial—had run to him with sheltering arms when all the world cruelly baited him—she was with him now in his hour of final triumph. Through Japtown they sped and out onto the broad trail of dust between the orchards. Home—their new home in the midst of the glory of growing things—lay ahead. It was Bruce Lees' Los Pinos.

The motor had purred many minutes and no word was between them. Each had a mind for the lusty scene of that afternoon. Rommie broke silence:

"John—I was thinking——"

"Of what, little girl?" he asked, bending close to her. Great love was in his eyes.

"——that now I know—I know the meaning of a little text. It was all worked out in pink-and-yellow worsted—something I found once in a trunk after mother had—gone. Maybe she made it when she was a little girl——"

"Well?"

"It said, John, 'Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do.'"

One of her arms slipped about his neck, and his head was drawn down until a soft cheek could be laid against his cheek.

"My wonderful man!" she was whispering brokenly. "You called our people; but you also *did*, John; you *did!*"

THE END.

Foreign Talent

BEING ANOTHER ADVENTURE OF THE DANCING MASTER AND HIS ASSISTANT

By Wells Hastings

Author of "The Patriots," "The Morocco Notebook," Etc.

AT regular and almost rhythmic periods I fall into the error of believing that at last I understand my friend and master completely, that the time has come when he can no longer startle or puzzle me; and as regularly I am startled or puzzled or shocked into the sane and comfortable belief that he is too surprising, too individual, to be learned like a book in the short space of a lifetime. He is like an infinity, which I may constantly approach, but never quite attain, but from time to time I forget that.

Although summer had come, it brought with it no abatement of our popularity or the general furore for dancing. Most of our patrons had left the city, but good roads and high-powered cars made it easy for them to reach us. Later we were to go to Newport, where we had already leased a semi-open hall, but in the meantime our New York Salle de Danse was as prosperously crowded as ever. So that, at first, it seemed to me that René Shawn had suddenly taken leave of his senses, when he showed me the engraver's sample of an announcement that the Salle de Danse was to be closed for two weeks. His casual way of breaking the news to me was typical enough, but it was news my common sense was unable to credit. Two weeks' idleness meant the loss of at least thirteen thousand dollars, and, rich as we were growing, it is not in human nature to toss aside such a sum. In my surprise, I stammered out some such idea to Shawn.

Shawn gave me an irritatingly paternal smile. "The trouble with you is, my dear Frank, that you are persistently superficial. The mechanism of flesh and blood is, after all, a mechanism. The human machine, like any other contrivance, must have its periods of rest, if it is to keep running at its highest efficiency. We are stale and thin and overmuscular; we are losing our lines, our silhouette, as the French say; much of our success is due to personality, to our peculiar magnetism, if you will. If we do not advance, we go backward. In short, Frank, you and I are about to take a jaunt to the gay Paris, we are to slumber in deck chairs, and be fed upon the ocean-borrowed fat of the land."

"Stop talking rot," I protested. "I don't want a gale of nonsense about our magnetism or our silhouettes. If you are just plain lazy and want to loaf, say so, but if you are up to anything, and sober second thought tells me that is more likely, I think I should be taken into your confidence, René."

"Control, Frank, is the secret of success. If you will keep your shirt on, as the vulgar saying goes, you shall presently see my inmost heart."

By this I was sure that something was in the air. René's English grows

playfully elaborate when he is much pleased or much troubled.

"Well, then, start at the beginning," I said. "You are proposing a vacation which will cost us some thousands, and as you are pretending that we need the sea air and a sight of Paris, I suppose that France really is to be our destination. Cutting out this flummery about our delicate constitutions and human machinery, I should like to know what business is important enough to take us abroad at this time."

Shawn jerked a chair up close to my own. "I'll tell you, Frank," he said, in a lowered voice. "We have, as you justly point out, a considerable fortune to our credit in various banks here in New York. If we could be certain that the sun would always keep on shining, we might let it stay where it is, but there is a bit of a cloud at present, which may or may not develop unpleasantly. I am a provident creature, Frank, and if occasion should arise to leave New York in a hurry, I should like to have all this money somewhere where we can reach it. I propose to ask for it in gold—the least easily traced of any form of currency—and to take it in this form for deposit with those good French bankers who have always thought well of us under other, but equally euphuistic, names. In coarse brevity, I think it the part of wisdom to lay pipes for a get-away."

A conscience which is not quite clear can give a man as many thrills as flying over a mountain range in an aëroplane. The sudden chill of apprehension which ran along my spine was not a new sensation.

"What has happened, René?" I asked.

"Nothing has happened yet—I don't wait for things to happen—but it came to my ears that Tom Fiske is not only in New York, but has been put on the detective force in some special capacity."

Here, indeed, was a cloud on our horizon worth noticing. We had last known Fiske as a member of Scotland Yard. He was a shrewd man, certainly not an Englishman, although I had not been able to even make a guess as to his nationality. There are one or two of his kind in every great police organization; men who to all appearances have no profession at all, who seem to be well bred and cultivated idlers, men with every earmark of gentle breeding, who can move inconspicuously at the most exclusive gatherings, and yet who can disguise themselves like the detectives of popular fiction, and can appear with equal ease at a conclave of Polish anarchists or the whispered mischief of the gunmen's opium dive. They are versatile, polyglot, and protean, invaluable servants of the secret forces of law and order. This man Fiske was our particular black beast. We had had no real encounter with him, but on more than one occasion his suspicion of us was evident—and unfortunately well founded. Our respect for him had been great enough to cause us to cut short a sojourn in London, which had been in every other regard satisfying in the extreme. If he was to be a permanency in New York, René's caution was nothing but the most obvious common sense.

Three days after this interview, we sailed. We took only one small steamer trunk between us, but it was so heavy that porters and stewards, who moved it under our close supervision, groaned their wrath and amazement.

The trip itself was uneventful. We had the best of weather and a five-day steamer each way, and our Paris bankers received us with a bland, unquestioning enthusiasm. If they were surprised at such large deposits in actual bullion, they were too skilled in the

ways of the world to give any outward sign of an embarrassing curiosity.

We took up our duties again in New York with a comfortable sense of work well done, but otherwise as if there had been no interruption. Shawn's introduction of two new dances, which we had hastily acquired in an afternoon in Paris, gave sufficient explanation of our absence, and seemed to make our patrons feel that they could depend on us for the *dernier cri*, a state of mind which Shawn was not slow in turning into profit.

After all, there had been some sense in Shawn's whimsical fooling. We had neither of us been tired out, but there is no denying that our ten days at sea had given us new zest for our work, and a decided mental stimulation. To my mind, this alone was worth all the expense of the trip, for not many days after our return we were confronted with a situation that would have been most trying to unsteady nerves and jaded wits. My appetite for excitement is, I suppose, an abnormal one, but one evening more than fed it full, and for days thereafter I found myself abundantly satisfied with the crackers and milk of ordinary life.

We had no particular favorites among our patrons, but there were a few whom we especially disliked, chief among these being a Mrs. Rupert Bradish. Even before she commenced to annoy us, we discovered a common aversion to her. I was unable to define my personal antipathy, but René said, with some force, that she had neither manners nor conscience. He was, I suspect, more troubled by her ruthless ill breeding than by her doubtful moral viewpoint; for, when all is said and done, René Shawn's own conscience is somewhat rudimentary.

In any place where the careless world of fashion gathers, trifles of value, scarfs, fans, and odds and ends of jewelry are constantly being mislaid or lost. The ushers at the Metropolitan Opera House, or any theater, must have picked up enough of this costly miscellany to build a new building if the value of their findings were to contribute to such a fund. At our Salle de Danse the nightly total of these things was a constant surprise to me, but people wore their best, and they were engaged in a serious recreation, where their best was promptly forgotten.

Weary as we were at the end of our long day, we made it part of our routine to go scrupulously over our whole establishment, gathering up the opulent flotsam and jetsam the high tide of gayety had left as it ebbed in the small hours. It was too rich a harvest to be trusted to the cleaners who came at daybreak. The certainty of getting their belongings back may have encouraged the carelessnes of our patrons, but it certainly added confidence to the esteem in which they held us.

Shawn's dislike for Mrs. Bradish, therefore, was given fresh vitality when she came to us with the story of a missing piece of jewelry, which neither our search of the evening before, nor our questioning of the cleaners, nor a third careful going over of the whole place, was able to bring to light. When she came to him twice again with similar stories of still further losses, he told me in so many words that the woman was either a knave or a liar.

"Knave!" I repeated. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that unless I miss my guess, she is just a plain ordinary crook. You know as well as I do, Frank, that she hasn't lost anything here. Once she might have misplaced something, and thought she lost it here, but that could hardly happen three times."

"But what possible object could she have?" I protested. My dislike was as keen as Shawn's, but, as Mrs. Bradish had made no claim against us for her

reported losses, I could not in fairness see how she injured us, or hoped to draw any profit for herself.

"I don't know what her object is," Shawn said, frowning, "but I'll bet you anything you like that she is up to something. Either that, or she is beginning to lose her mind, and if she is foolish she is foolish like a fox. It's up to both of us to keep an eye on that dame from now on. I should be glad of any excuse to close our doors to her."

Our impression of an acquaintance is generally, I suppose, a composite one, a blurred photographic memory of many moods and aspects, which gives us a more or less illuminating average; but the separate impressions are so subconsciously registered, that each of them is apt to be a surprise when that acquaintance is under a particular scrutiny. We knew that we disliked Mrs. Bradish, but when for our own protection we began to watch her for whole evenings, our vague dislike was given many concrete causes. She was absurdly vain, and, like most vain people, jealous of every one about her. She was furtive and sly, and at times I even caught a flash of that reckless and appalling cruelty which it is possible for only evil-minded, self-centered women, and occasional masculine weaklings, to conceive and harbor. She was spiteful, with a practiced facility in the only kind of wit which needs no mental endowment, the bitter and unsavory art of making others ill at ease. She seemed fatuously assured of her reputation as a wit, and, indeed, to our amazement, she seemed to have quite a following. I have always held that the world is largely composed of fools, but it is hard to credit their position and numbers.

Wit of Mrs. Bradish's kind depends, of course, upon an object; the unsuitability of the object she chose was proof enough of her lack of any real intelligence.

There was nothing about Celia Huntingdon, except her well-disguised poverty, to invite attack. She was a stately, self-composed, distinctly handsome young woman of about twenty-eight, generally liked, and invited everywhere. That she was poor there was no denying, even to us she came by special arrangement at a nominal price, partly because Shawn approved of her dancing, and partly because some of the wealthiest and most exclusive followed in her train. We knew that she was an orphan, that her father had snuffed himself out as the last spark of his blazing millions had disappeared. Just how she managed to live was a mystery, although, like a few others in her unfortunate position, she probably got her clothes and a substantial commission from a prominent dressmaker, and lived on oatmeal on those rare occasions when she was not eating terrapin and canvasback at the tables of her still fortunate friends.

Shawn took an almost proprietary delight in a recent rumor that she was engaged to something of a curiosity—a really decent and altogether likable young man of her set. We held this man fortunate; for Celia Huntingdon, whatever her means of existence might have been, was sweet-tempered, womanly, and intelligent. She had a trick of giving familiar things a mirthful luminosity; "the thing that Celia Huntingdon last said" was in constant circulation in the social currency. And yet it was this finely equipped young woman that, for unknown reasons, Mrs. Bradish chose as her especial butt and target. She came back to her again and again, like an insane old moth to a bright and temperate flame; that she was gently singed at each attack seemed only to increase her ill-natured ardor.

One of the less desiccated of the abominable tribe of statisticians has

contributed the valuable discovery that crimes of violence usually spring from immaterial causes, that manslaughter, for instance, generally springs from no larger source than the upsetting of a glass of beer or a dispute over a ten-cent piece; and I am willing to agree that official investigators of crime would be more often successful if they could free their minds of the idea that great crimes must be the result of great provocations. The meanest cause is not too small to stir the vengeful imagination of the mean.

Two weeks after the first of her reported losses, Mrs. Bradish telephoned for permission to bring a friend. As I have said before, Shawn's patrons came to him only upon invitation, and although they were paying guests, they were never allowed to forget that Shawn was their host, with all of a host's privileges. If any of them wished to bring a friend, outside of the regular circle, they went through the same polite form they would have used in asking the same favor of a private host. Shawn hesitated at the telephone, put his hand over the mouthpiece, and told me what Mrs. Bradish wanted.

"What shall we say, Frank?" he asked. "She asks it as a particular favor, and only for this evening."

"I suppose you can't very well refuse," I said doubtfully.

Shawn nodded, and mendaciously telephoned that he would be delighted.

His delight, when Mrs. Bradish appeared with her "friend," was, however, more than tempered. I recognized him, and Shawn recognized him, before Mrs. Bradish had murmured languidly: "Monsieur Shawn, Monsieur Colvaine, may I present my friend, Mr. Fiske?"

Tom Fiske, late of Scotland Yard! Tom Fiske, smiling, immaculate, polished, giving a friendly hand to each of us, but with a flash of astonished recognition at the back of his eyes, which even he was not quick enough to veil immediately. He murmured some mannerly convention and turned away with Mrs. Bradish.

"Carefully, Frank," Shawn whispered. "He'll turn and look at us in a minute. When you get a chance, slip into the conservatory, and I will join you there."

There are times when dancing has its disadvantages. It is hard to do well when you are expecting a harsher hand than your partner's to be laid upon your shoulder, and a harsher voice to whisper a sentence which you have sometimes heard in nightmares. At the first opportunity I changed the thin automatic, that the clever French designers had made to look so much like a cigarette case, from my hip pocket to the inside pocket of my dress coat. The barbaric, syncopated music told me again and again, "He has nothing on you. He has nothing on you," and yet —I wondered. We had been pretty hard put to it in London, Shawn and I; we had been careless of boundaries, quite possibly we had overstepped them.

As I caught sight of Fiske, from time to time, I knew perfectly well that we had overstepped them. The worst of it was, he knew what we had done, and had shown that he had guessed the connection between the deeds and the doers. My forehead was damp with something more than my exertion, when at last my opportunity came to wait for Shawn, and I had waited and watched so long that it took all my determination to stand still in the little darkened conservatory.

But Shawn is to be depended upon; he came before my agony grew unendurable.

"Well, Frank?" he said, smiling down whimsically at my distress.

I tried to smile, too. "Well, René?" I answered. "Do you suppose——"

"Frank, I don't know, but I am rather inclined to think not. I don't

know why he is here, but I don't think he came on our account. I'm sure, or almost sure, that he was surprised. What did you think?"

"It seemed so to me, René, but if he didn't come for us, or at least to watch us, what did he come for?"

"I can't guess, unless there could be something in that woman's stories about her blessed jewelry. I wouldn't believe her under oath, but there might be something to it, and she might be bringing Fiske for that. Just the same, it's an unpleasant coincidence; whether he came on our account or not, there isn't a doubt in the world that he knew us both the minute he set eyes on us. New York's a big little city, Frank, but if it's gotten so we have to meet Tom Fiske in the bosom of our happy and quite profitable family, it's too small a town for gentlemen with so marked a taste for individual freedom of action as we. By our good St. Nicholas, look there!"

Shawn's grip bit into my arm, and I glanced up at him in surprise. The troubled look had gone, and his amber eyes were glinting with their natural fires. I followed their glance out into our ballroom. I expected to see Fiske, but he was nowhere to be seen. Mrs. Bradish and Celia Huntingdon were standing near our door in apparently amiable conversation.

"See! In her hand," Shawn whispered. "Her diamond pendant, Frank. I just saw her take it from her neck."

Then I noticed that one of Mrs. Bradish's hands was loosely closed. Between two of the fingers hung a loop of threadlike platinum chain.

"From Miss Huntingdon's?" I asked, in my amazement.

"Of course not. From her own. Watch her now; for a great light is breaking."

Mrs. Bradish turned as if to go away, glanced toward our door unseeingly, then came back and touched Celia Huntingdon's dress here and there in the fussy, irritating way some women have of straightening another's furbelows. She spoke a sentence or two, nodded carelessly, and sailed majestically away. Her hands hung at her sides, and I saw that both of them were empty.

"Did she—did she——" I began, stammering.

"Surest thing you know, my good Frank. She framed her up—clumsily, to be sure, but well enough for an amateur."

"Did you see where the pendant went?"

"Into that velvet belt right behind the big bow. She probably saw Miss Huntingdon put her handkerchief there." René's hand softly smote me between the shoulders. "Fly, Frank! Get ye gone! We only have a minute or so at best. Oh, Miss Huntingdon, of course. Slip me the pendant when I pass you, dancing."

When I got on the floor, Miss Huntingdon was just smiling acceptance to the nice young man, who rumor said was her fiancé, but it was not a question of whether I ought to have that dance—I had to have it. I swung her away from that indignant and gaping young gentleman as carelessly as if he had been invisible. Miss Huntingdon turned her head close to mine in a quite natural surprise, but she fell mechanically into step.

"Monsieur Colvaine," she said, "I am afraid you have made a mistake. This isn't your dance. I—I never knew you to be so impetuous."

She must have been ruffled and not a little displeased, and even in my excitement I admired the soft control with which she spoke. We were dancing a figure of the maxixe, but I stopped abruptly and started to apologize. I was willing enough to take her back now, for the hard diamond of the pendant was pressing in my palm, with its

platinum chain safely gathered about it.

I left her with her still-gaping partner as abruptly as I had taken her from him. If any of the old dowagers who sat along the wall were watching, they must have thought that I had suddenly taken leave of my senses; for no sooner had I made my hurried bow to Miss Huntingdon, than I fairly dragged another young woman out on the floor. I held the pendant now in a precarious grip between two fingers lest my new partner should feel it, and I was dancing out of time, too rapidly for the music; for I was driven by a sense of something immediately impending, and it had suddenly occurred to me that Tom Fiske might take this time for a personal interview, that possibly his eyes had been upon me when I plucked that pendant from its brief hiding place. I wanted Shawn, and I had to follow, whether I would or not, an intricate dance figure to come to him.

My heart was drumming and my breath coming with difficulty before Shawn was able to come to my rescue, but I flatter myself that my hand was steady, and that however much my dancing members may have trembled, I made the transfer of the pendant so surely and swiftly that not even Tom Fiske, had he been watching, could have seen it pass from me to Shawn.

I was apprehensive enough to be wild to be rid of the thing, but the moment it had passed, I cursed myself for my folly. I still felt that apprehension, that sense of impending trouble, and orders or no orders, I felt like a coward to have passed this damning bit of evidence on to my master. I knew well Shawn's courage and resource, but it seemed to me that both of us had acted hastily, and that for a mere bit of altruism we might be risking exposure and disgrace.

All the possibilities of the future flashed before me with the brief and vivid rapidity of the thoughts of a drowning man. I saw the blue uniforms of the police, the dusty, ugly walnut of the courtroom, the narrow, misery-polished benches that face each other in the prison van, and then—that narrow cell itself with its high grilled window and mocking cot bed that can give no man rest. Somehow I could have stood some such place for a while—a month of it, I knew, would kill René, as surely as such a place would kill a tiger. I would have given everything I possessed to have the pendant back again.

Then the cloud which had been hanging over me broke. Mrs. Bradish screamed, and I slipped my hand into the pocket of my coat, as I bowed my breathless partner to her seat. I was no longer afraid. The end had come, but I knew that they were not going to take René.

A man of my kind learns to look about him quickly, to locate his friend and his enemy, and their relative position to the possibly necessary window or doorway. All about the room dancers had stopped in various graceful or ridiculous positions, struck as suddenly motionless by the sound of that scream as the subjects of the Sleeping Princess. In the middle of the floor I saw Celia Huntingdon still smiling, in the arms of her nice young man; Mrs. Bradish stood by the doorway which led into the hall, her hands clutching dramatically at her throat.

In all that gathering, only two people moved as I watched: René Shawn and Tom Fiske were running to Mrs. Bradish from different parts of the room. The next second they were standing together in front of her. It was natural enough—the first to come to her assistance should be her host and her friend—but for all that I did not like it. With my hand still in my breast pocket, I hurried in their direction.

"You are sure it is gone?" I heard

Tom Fiske say, as I came up. "Your diamond pendant?"

Mrs. Bradish covered her mouth with her tiny handkerchief and sobbed, nodding like a Chinese mandarin.

"Another loss?" Shawn asked. And I heard the delicate edge of derision in his voice.

Fiske turned and looked him coldly up and down. "Mrs. Bradish," he said, "I have some memory of having met this gentleman before; possibly the return of your pendant may be arranged for."

Things were going too fast, and I interrupted. "Pardon me, Mrs. Bradish, have you a suspicion? This is the fourth loss you have had. It is getting beyond coincident. There must be somebody you suspect."

"It is too dreadful, too dreadful," Mrs. Bradish sobbed. "She is too sweet a girl——"

"Girl?" Fiske interrupted, surprised in spite of himself.

Mrs. Bradish calmed herself somewhat, and turned to René. "I do feel that I have been robbed, Monsieur Shawn. In fact, I am quite certain of it. I have no wish to harm this young woman, but such a person is a menace to society. To make sure, and to clear up the matter, I wore my famous pendant to-night, which I was certain she could not resist, and I got the police department to let me have their best man. It was not dealing quite fairly with you, I know, but if I had introduced Mr. Fiske as a detective much of his value would have been gone—such things get out, you know. Now, with your permission, he will make his search and his arrest as quietly as possible."

"In my opinion," said Fiske, "if your pendant really has been stolen it was the work of some man—perhaps I should say two men"—he looked from Shawn to me and back again—"the work of professional crooks."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Bradish, her face growing an angry red. "They told me you were a man of intelligence, fresh from Scotland Yard. You're acting like an idiot. My pendant was taken by a woman, and I am positive of it. Man, indeed! You will be accusing Monsieur Shawn here next, which reminds me that perhaps he can be of help. A good friend of mine has told me that he was at the bottom of getting all our jewelry back for us when it disappeared the night that swami performed with his Dancing Doll. What *is* your advice, Monsieur Shawn?"

"My advice," said Shawn gravely, "is to send for the police."

"The police? But I have told you that I have a central-office detective here with me now."

Shawn bowed and smiled. "Mr. Fiske will understand, I am sure," he said, "that I can hardly permit any such distinguished gathering as this to be searched by a regular member of the force. With your permission, I will telephone to the inspector himself, who happens to be a friend of mine. I consider his presence here important. I shall ask him to bring the best of his police matrons here with him. If you have grounds for suspecting a woman we should have a woman here to help in the search.

"Get the people dancing, Frank, while I telephone. We will make our announcement when the inspector gets here."

The room still buzzed with the subdued excitement; people were curious, but hesitated to ask open questions, so that when the music struck up again at my signal, there was only a moment of hesitation before the various groups broke once more into kaleidoscopic motion.

I saw Shawn go into the hall where the telephone booth was located, and I saw Tom Fiske following close after

him. It was plain enough that Fiske still believed Shawn to be the thief, and was going to give him no opportunity to place the pendant in safe hiding.

Discovery had been postponed, but with the coming of the inspector it seemed to me inevitable, and I was very anxious; for ingenuous as Shawn was, I feared that it would be impossible for him to make any sort of satisfactory explanation when the jewel was discovered on his person.

Time has a queer way of going at once fast and slow. I dreaded the coming of the inspector, but I longed, like a man facing an operation, to have it over with. If we were to be discovered and to make a fight for it, I wanted our exposure to come as soon as possible; nothing saps the strength like waiting. And time dragged interminably, yet when the inspector came at last it seemed to have gone in a breath and left me standing unprepared.

The inspector was a pleasant, shrewd, stoutish man, and the matron he brought with him was a woman who showed no mark of her profession. They might have been any dignified couple of some small importance in the world, who had stepped in from the street. But because they were strange, and not in evening dress, their arrival made an immediate sensation.

Shawn seemed as eager as I to have the agony over with. He stopped the music with a gesture, and, standing beside the newcomers, clapped his hands together for attention.

"I am sorry," he said, "to be compelled to make a most distasteful announcement. Several times Mrs. Rupert Bradish has informed me that she has lost pieces of jewelry here. This evening she wore a very valuable diamond pendant, and she has either dropped it, or it has been accidentally caught in some one's garments, or—it has been stolen. Mrs. Bradish insists that it be found. I am personally out of sympathy with her method, but since she is bent upon introducing the police, I have asked my good friend, Inspector Blank, to help us in the matter. I propose that we search the room over first, and that my various guests make sure that the article in question has not been caught on some hook or button. If the pendant cannot be found in this way, I should be deeply grateful if you will voluntarily submit to a search. I am ashamed to have to ask this, and of course I am sure that the pendant will not be found in the possession of any guest of mine."

There was an awkward silence and a half-angry stir. Men and women began apprehensively glancing down at their clothes as if they feared even the accidental possession of the pendant. Then a few began looking about the floor, under the chairs, and behind the palms. One shrill-voiced girl screamed, "What fun!" and the general nervousness broke into laughter. Fortunately we were dealing with a class, like the Athenians, who "spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing"; our search became a game to old and young alike, and our patrons the actors in some fine mystery story. They not only volunteered to be searched, but offered themselves eagerly. The sensation was novel and, therefore, amusing.

For me it was not amusing. I watched the women file away after the matron into their dressing room with little concern. Mrs. Bradish looked triumphant, and although she had not dared as yet to actually accuse Celia Huntingdon, I saw that she managed to keep near her, as they left the room.

"Well," said the inspector, with a smile, when they had gone, "who is to be the first?"

I saw Shawn move, and I stepped forward in front of him. The inspector ran skillful hands over me and

through my pockets. He paused with a grimace at my disguised automatic, but he said nothing. As soon as he had done I stepped back beside Shawn, signaling him to pass me the pendant, but he shook his head. There was much laughter as guest after guest was searched. Shawn came last, and Tom Fiske smiled and bent forward eagerly. I was glad the inspector had left me my automatic.

I should get over the habit of underrating René Shawn's capabilities. Of course the inspector found nothing.

Tom Fiske's face was blank. "Look again," he said.

The inspector frowned. "What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean——" Fiske began.

But Shawn interrupted him. "Inspector, this man claims to be one of your men. He has only been with you a short time, I understand. He is the only one of us here who has not been searched. This is a mere formality, but I think it only fair to my guests that no one who has been here this evening should be overlooked."

"Search me?" Fiske cried angrily. "What do you mean by that? Do you take me for a thief like——"

"That will do, sir." The inspector was plainly angry. "Mr. Shawn is right. You have nothing to be afraid of, man—or have you?"

Fiske, like a fool, hung indignantly back, and the inspector stepped up to him, and, without more ado, gripped him by the shoulder and plunged a hand into one of his pockets. I saw the gripping fingers tighten, and then he pushed Fiske away and struck him a great blow with his clenched fist. His face was scarlet as he turned to us.

"Gentlemen, I am ashamed," he said. "I can only say that this man is a new one, and that he came to me highly recommended. I need not tell you that he shall be treated as he deserves." He opened one of his hands. "Here is the pendant."

"My good Frank," said René, when they had all gone, "you still have something to learn. You looked as guilty as if you had the thing yourself."

I suppose I looked absurd and uncomfortable, for he tilted back his flaming head and roared with laughter. But when I tried to laugh, too, he became suddenly serious.

"No, Frank, that was wrong of me," he said, laying his hand on my shoulder. "I know that your fears were for your worthless friend, but I am too old a dog to be caught so easily. You should know that by this time. I only did the obvious thing. I had to get rid of the pendant, and I had to get rid of Tom Fiske, once and for all. He is an insensate beast, but dangerous. I dropped my little offering in his pocket when he came to Mrs. Bradish's assistance. That old girl, by the way, must be stewing in her own venom to-night."

"Do you suppose they'll jail Fiske?" I asked uncomfortably.

Shawn shook his head. "No, my Frank," he said, "things are not done that way in the department. They will ship him back to England as quickly and as quietly as possible, and you and I shall be left to teach our little dances as innocently as ever."

WHAT THE OSTRICH DOES

Ostriches that are reared in the United States live to be more than thirty-five years old, produce an average yearly yield of one and one-quarter pounds of feathers, and bring to their owners from twenty to thirty dollars a year apiece.

Amsterdam Dutch

By Frank R. Adams

How a worthy old couple whose ancestors came from the dikes of Holland became the center of one of the biggest sensations that ever happened in the village

A DILAPIDATED buggy drove across the moonlit snow to the outskirts of our village. In it were two men, bundled to the eyes in furs.

At an insignificant shack they stopped and tied the horse.

"He's still up," said one of the men, the smaller of the two. "There's his lantern out by the woodshed."

"That don't prove anything, Mr. Redman," the other replied. "Old Peter is scared to death of burglars. He leaves a lantern out all night to make people think he is up getting wood or working at something."

"He's a fool," commented Redman, striding up the path to the cottage. "Good heavens, sheriff, what's that?"

A sound closely duplicating an explosion in a boiler factory came from the building ahead of them. There was a rattle of tinware, the crash of glass, and a huge, dark object jumped off the roof and struck the ground at their feet.

"That's just one of Peter's burglar alarms." The sheriff stifled a laugh. "I forgot to warn you about it. You tripped over a string he stretches across the yard at night which releases a wash boiler filled with window panes and pipe fittings he keeps propped up on the roof."

Redman snorted. "He ought not to be allowed to endanger the public safety that way. He won't have a chance after this."

He knocked loudly on the door.

There was no answer, so he repeated the summons and shouted: "Open the door, Peter Vogt."

A quavering voice answered: "Go away. He ain't to home."

"It's all right, Peter," the sheriff assured the man inside. "We aren't burglars. It's John Jensen, the sheriff, and Mr. Redman."

There was a murmured colloquy behind the door, then four or five different locks and bolts were released, and a tiny crack of light appeared.

"If that's you, sheriff, put your star in through the crack so I can see it."

"All right, Peter." The sheriff started to comply.

"Don't do it," commanded Redman. "It's nonsense. Force your way in."

"Not on your life," the sheriff returned. "Peter Vogt is a friend of mine. The law says I've got to help you, but it don't say nothing about making me scare him to death into the bargain."

Through the opening in the door Jensen shoved a burly fist containing his badge of office.

"All right, Mr. Jensen, come in."

The door opened wide, and the two men stepped inside, quite dwarfing the tiny interior. Behind a table covered with a red-and-white checkerboard cloth stood Old Peter and his wife, huddled together like timid animals at the approach of danger. A kerosene lamp with a cardboard shade stood on

the table, and illuminated the kindly, placid features of the gentle old couple.

Peter himself was tall and spare, with a sort of careless angularity about his frame that reminded you of a home-made automobile. He was old, but his face and speech were so gentle, and his eye was so bright that you never would have noticed his age unless you looked at his mouth which, on account of the absence of teeth, folded over like a gentleman's empty wallet.

The wife was rounder and softer and shorter. There was a mischievous look in her eye, and her eyebrows lifted at the corners as if she could trace her family tree back to some Dutch elf who lived hundreds of years ago on the dikes of Holland.

Redman spoke shortly. "Got the money for the rent?"

Peter's voice trembled. "No, Mr. Redman, but maybe I could pay a little to-morrow."

"That's what I thought," said the landlord. "Sheriff, do your duty. I will help you, as I'm in a hurry to get home."

Redman had the eye of a fish and a thick neck like a toad. His laugh was like the faint echo of an electric automobile horn, and was in itself a warning to widows and orphans to get out of the way and hide their money. His virtues, such as they were, he saved for Sunday, when, with a look that would be a credit to a fat saint, if there are any, he took up the collection in the Methodist church.

There was a certain cold officiousness about the way he puttered back and forth between the door and the street, carrying at arm's length each time some insignificant article of Peter's household paraphernalia that stirred up the soul of gentle old Peter as he stood silently to one side with his aged wife, who was blinking at the ruthless way her belongings were being handled.

"I'm sorry I have to do this," said the constable, as he struggled with an ancient haircloth sofa with three legs, "but the old son of a gun has got the law on his side, so it's up to me."

"That's all right," replied Peter, with a grateful look. "I don't mind it a bit; but the old woman here, she's younger than me, and she always takes things harder."

Peter's voice was gentle, as always. Probably he and his wife were the most generally liked people in all our village, and no one, save possibly old man Redman, who was just as cordially disliked, could have had the heart to turn Peter out of the little shack he fondly thought of as a home.

There had been a time when Peter had earned enough to live on comfortably by doing odd jobs around the village. Every one employed him, though they could have had the work better done by others. Peter had a way with him even when carrying out ashes or spreading fertilizer on the lawn that was irresistible.

But this had been a hard winter. The bank said so when any one tried to borrow money, so he knew it must be true, and, like sheep, every one in the village began to be cautious about spending anything. The result was that we all did our odd jobs ourselves, and Peter's income had fallen off to almost nothing.

Regretfully but with gentle care Peter bundled his wife up in a heavy overcoat he ordinarily wore himself, and they followed their furniture out of doors. Even the tiny cook stove, with the fire still going, was placed in the yard to burn itself out.

When every last article had been dumped into an insignificant pile in the snow, Redman locked the door and walked back to the buggy, without apparently seeing Peter and his wife standing helplessly by their lares and penates.

Peter gazed thoughtfully after the retreating figure and reflected mildly: "He's so dog-gone mean I should think he would be afraid he'd bite himself."

"Peter Vogt," his little old wife remonstrated, "I ain't seen you mad in forty years. You been too old to commence now."

Peter patted her arm and sighed.

"Maybe so," he admitted. "I tell you, old woman, I take you over to visit Mrs. Muller, next door. You stay there and keep warm. I think I go down and see Dave. Maybe I get the law on old man Redman."

"Don't you let them put you in jail, Peter," the old woman warned. "Them lawyers is foxy fellers."

"Not Dave," argued Peter; "he ain't a good enough lawyer to be very mean yet."

When he had arranged a lodging for the night with a sympathetic neighbor, Peter left his wife and shuffled off in the general direction of Washington Street, which is the main thoroughfare of our village. In youth Peter had contracted chilblains which had never left him, and from long practice his natural gait was a dance step that any tango teacher might envy. His tall, spare figure shook and rocked as if in time to inaudible music, and were it not for the seriousness of his face you would have been inclined to laugh at him.

There were two lawyers in our town. There was only business enough for one. Dave Butler was the one who was not getting it. One reason was because he didn't look old enough to know any law, and the other was because he was too bright and cheerful. The popular opinion was that an attorney ought to appear as if he had suffered a recent bereavement. That was the way Judge Cole looked. The judge was the rival legal fount, and to say the least he dressed up to his courtesy title.

Peter and Dave, by virtue of being the most cheerful men in the village, were quite naturally friends. Many people thought them shiftless, and accounted for their association by an overworked proverb to the effect that "birds of a feather flock together." It was toward Dave's office that Peter directed his sprightly steps.

Dave was in. He always was at night, because he slept there, and daytimes, for fear his first client might escape him.

"Have a chair, Peter," he urged cordially, "and fill up your pipe with some of my tobacco." He opened a drawer in his desk and rummaged around in it fruitlessly. "I forgot. I haven't any tobacco. I'll fill my pipe with some of yours. How's Mrs. Peter?"

"The old woman she feel pretty good. She's younger than me. She ought to feel good. She's only sixty-four. We both been pretty mad."

"Mad!" echoed the attorney, in astonishment. "Go on with you!"

"Yes," insisted the old man, "I never been so mad since when I was a boy over in Amsterdam and mine brother tore mine best pants. No, sir."

"What's it all about?"

Peter told his story. "Can I get the law on old Redman?" he asked at length.

Dave considered gravely. A young lawyer has to make the most of his first case. "Peter," he answered finally, "I'm afraid the law is against you. I'm sorry."

"You mean," said Peter, loath to abandon his plan of revenge, "that such a skinflint can hurt my old woman's feelings, and I can't do something about it?"

"Not legally," the attorney decided cautiously.

"Well, how about not legally? I don't care so long as he gets it."

Dave laughed and slapped his client on the knee. "Peter, you old bandit, I never suspected you of being so blood-

thirsty, but I guess a man will do a lot for his own woman." He sighed regretfully at the thought of his own lonesome life. Dave was twenty-four. "I tell you what, Peter, you let me think about it. I have a sort of an idea I want to work out. Come and see me to-morrow anyway."

Dave spent the balance of the evening in the village library, poring over that volume of the encyclopedia marked Ham-Hou. By the midnight express he sent a letter to a friend of his who worked for a telegraph company in Chicago.

The next day, along about noon, our village had a sensation. We hadn't had a real sensation since the time that man shot Roosevelt in Milwaukee.

On his way home to dinner, Miller, the station agent, went out of his way to hunt up Peter and give him a telegram. This in itself was unusual, because it was the first time in the memory of man that the village station agent had gone out of his way to be obliging to anybody.

But Miller knew what was in the telegram, and by twelve-thirty or twenty minutes after he had told it to his wife nearly everybody else in town knew what was in it, too.

It was a cable all the way from Holland, announcing that Peter, by the death of a distant relative, had fallen heir to two million guilders. Nobody in town knew whether a guilder was money or something to eat, but two million of anything was a tremendous lot, and we were all correspondingly impressed. Harry Harper, who edits the village weekly, thought a guilder was about fifty cents in American money.

Peter was more surprised than anybody else, as he couldn't recollect any rich relatives in his family, no matter how far he thought back. It never occurred to him to doubt his good luck, though, any more than it would to any one else.

On the strength of the telegram Peter and his wife took up their residence in the local hotel known as the Nelson House, which, I'm informed on the authority of the drummers who visit us occasionally, is the worst caravansary in North America. However, it was far grander than any quarters that the Peter family had ever inhabited, and Mrs. Peter insisted on staying in her room all the time in order to get her money's worth.

Peter was of a more social and sartorial turn of mind, and journeyed from emporium to emporium, accumulating raiment, haberdashery, and jewelry. He didn't spend any actual money. One reason was because he didn't have any, and the other because no one expected it. He was urged to open accounts everywhere, and to pay whenever he got ready.

Owing to the fact that he purchased his outfit piecemeal at so many different places, the result when Peter was fully dressed was nothing short of marvelous. Joseph's coat had nothing on Peter's, and Peter's vest would have put Joseph's eye out, to say nothing of enraging the mildest-tempered bull that ever lived.

In order to give the entire population a treat, Peter walked down the middle of our only paved street, taking a side step now and then which was not in his usual repertoire and swinging his arms looseiy in the breeze.

If Peter had been a drinking man he would never have come home at all, so many were the invitations extended to him to rest his foot on the bar rail of our one thirst parlor, in celebration of his acquisition of fortune.

Children going home from school stopped to admire the hero of the hour, and the cablegram was nearly worn out, so often was it folded and unfolded

to give every one a chance to read the wonderful words "two million."

Notwithstanding all the excitement, Peter didn't forget his appointment with Dave, and in the middle of the afternoon, having exhausted the possibilities of entertainment on the street, he dropped in at the lawyer's office to receive congratulations.

The young man smiled his welcome. "Well, Peter," he said, "you still remember your old friends, do you?"

"Sure," the old man replied, seating himself carefully, on account of the hobble trousers he was wearing, a concession to the latest London style. "I have come to make you rich," he declared. "I will give you all my law business."

"But you haven't any," suggested the attorney.

"Well"—Peter's face fell, but a later thought illumined it—"I'll make some law business. I'll insult old Redman once a week, and you can be busy getting me out of jail."

"That won't be necessary." Dave turned to some memoranda he had on his desk. "I think I've found a way you can make it uncomfortable for your friend Mr. Redman if you're willing to spend a little money."

"Sure." Peter was all for revenge. "What do I care for money? I got two million guilders, and all I really needed was ten dollars."

The lawyer unfolded his plan to the extravagantly dressed old man, who chuckled gleefully as the fine points of the scheme unfolded themselves.

Dave closed up his place of business, and he and Peter paid a visit to Judge Cole in his magnificent suite of offices over Martin & Varney's hardware store.

The judge had the finest house in town, and the best horses. He had come to the village when the lumber boom was on, and he had flourished and waxed rich with the litigations which naturally followed the advent of big business. The lumber boom departed. The sawmills closed down. So did most of the saloons. The streets became quiet once more. But Judge Cole stayed, and it was discovered that he either owned most of the property roundabout or had a first-mortgage claim on it.

The judge was not a miser exactly, but he was close. Of him it was said that he would squeeze a nickel until it yelled for help.

The judge was in, spending the afternoon wondering whether he could make more by foreclosing the mortgage on Widow Farquharson's cottage or letting her struggle along, trying to meet the interest by taking in washing.

The younger attorney broached the object of their visit. "You have a mortgage on the tannery, haven't you?" he inquired.

The judge smiled. "Yes, and it's 'way overdue, too. Did Redman send you here to ask for more time?"

"Not directly," returned Dave. "I wanted to know if you would sell that mortgage."

"Do you know how much it is for?" the judge inquired cautiously.

"Yes," replied Dave. "Forty thousand, isn't it?"

"Plus the interest," added the judge. "It amounts to nearly forty-three thousand now. You see, he kept on borrowing more and more on it, and he hasn't kept up the interest, but it's a first-class mortgage just the same, because Redman has lots of other property around town. Besides, he's going to take up part of it next month, when he begins to fill that contract he just got from the Universal Leather Company. I'd have to get a bonus for this mortgage. If I don't, I don't care to sell."

"We are prepared to pay a very liberal bonus. You have heard, of course, of Mr. Vogt's good fortune." Dave

indicated the richly appareled Peter, who had kept discreetly silent thus far.

"Here"—Peter drew a yellow slip from his vest pocket—"look at the telegram. It's the first telegram I ever got. The writing ain't very plain, but it came all the way from Amsterdam, Holland."

The judge examined the cablegram curiously.

"Mr. Vogt," continued Dave, leaning forward impressively and addressing the older man confidentially, "has a special reason for wanting to own that mortgage, and he's willing to pay liberally to gratify his whim. In return for the mortgage he wishes to give you his personal note for the amount, to be paid at sight. He will take it up as soon as his money arrives."

The judge chilled perceptibly. "You don't think I'd take his unsecured note in exchange for a mortgage on one of the finest tanneries in the State, do you?" Judge Cole whirled about in his chair back to his desk, with a short laugh. "You're only wasting your time."

"Naturally," persisted the young man, in an even tone of voice, "we expect to make it worth your while. There is a slight personal element in this transaction. Mr. Vogt used to be a tenant of Mr. Redman's, and feels that he is willing to spend a little money to cause him trouble."

Judge Cole smiled. He did not like Redman very well himself.

Butler went on persuasively: "For this mortgage of forty thousand and interest we are willing to pay you sixty thousand dollars, which you have to admit is a very tempting profit."

The judge faced them again. "Couldn't do it, my boy. I don't need the money."

"How about seventy-five thousand?"

The judge hesitated. "No."

"We'll make it a hundred thousand. That's more than double your money."

The young man stood up. "If you don't want that, we can't go any higher. Come on, Peter."

"Wait a minute," the judge stopped them. "Let me consider." His eyes took on a calculating look. "Let me see the cablegram." Peter handed it to him silently again. "I'll take you. Draw up the papers, and we'll file them in the morning."

Two days later Peter, the plutocrat, David Butler, the attorney, and John Jensen, the sheriff, assembled at the tannery. The tannery is the one thing that lends individuality to our village, makes it different from most communities of the Middle West. The large white brick building, with the tower on one corner, makes the village look different, and the persistent dark-red odor which penetrates even to our most exclusive homes certainly makes the village smell different.

Peter wasted no time in preliminaries. He began carrying out the first things he could lay his hands on and dumping them in the alley. His manner was a fairly correct imitation of old man Redman's when he had put Peter out of house and home. Peter's labors began in the receiving room, which was stacked high with raw hides of every description.

The tannery employees stood around helplessly, watching the activities of the elderly whirlwind. They did not know whether to attempt to stop him or not. They were afraid of the wrath of their boss, but the fact that Peter had been accompanied by the sheriff made them cautious about interrupting him.

Peter had moved the greater part of a pile of hides out into the alley when a sudden commotion among the bystanders announced the arrival of Mr. Redman. He bore down upon Peter ponderously, like a superdreadnaught, his neck swelling with anger.

"Here!" he shouted, in the tone that

ordinarily gave his employees a cold chill. "Put back those hides!"

Peter did not look up, but went on methodically shoving the untanned leather through the door.

His calmness puzzled the other man, and he paused to inquire: "What's the matter? Are you crazy?"

"It's all right," explained the sheriff genially. "Here's a writ of foreclosure, Mr. Redman."

Jensen served the papers with evident pleasure.

Redman looked at the writ and apparently read it over twice before he comprehended what had happened.

"Come into my office," he said shortly, and turned away. The others followed him, all but Peter.

"Come on, Peter," invited his attorney.

"I ain't got time," returned Peter, casting an eye into the next room, where some bales were ready for shipment. "I got a lot more things to put out."

"You can do that afterward," counseled the lawyer.

Reluctantly Peter abandoned his task and went into the private office.

Redman sat at his desk. The others uninvited took seats. Redman scowled.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

The attorney cleared his throat. "My client"—he paused luxuriously upon the unfamiliar word—"is anxious to enter the manufacturing business in the local field, and with that end in view he has purchased the mortgage on your tannery, which as you know is long overdue. He has, possibly, been a trifle hasty in moving your goods, but, as you'll realize, he's anxious to get things under his own control as soon as possible, on account of the improvement in business which is approaching. I say he has been hasty because there is just a possibility that you would wish to buy in the tannery on a mortgage sale. Of course, if that's the case, the matter can be arranged privately, and the business could be conducted, uninterrupted, under the present management."

As the young lawyer recited this speech, in a soft, persuasive tone of voice, as if he were asking some one to have a little more sugar in his coffee, the village magnate grew red and puffy about his eyes. When Dave had finished speaking, Redman was so choked he could not get out a word in reply.

Peter leaned back in his chair comfortably and looked around the office complacently.

"I think, Dave," he said, "I'll have some blue wall paper put on this room, and I'm going to get a stylish rug."

"Well, of all the nerve!" Redman finally exploded.

"Easy," advised Dave, then addressed the sheriff: "John, notify the hands that the tannery is closed down, pending the reorganization."

Jensen started for the door.

"Wait a minute," said Redman. "Don't stop the men from working. We've only just got time to fill our contract with the Universal Leather Company; the loss of a day will spoil it. I'm going to take up that mortgage as soon as I get my first payment from the Universal."

"Nothing doing," said Dave. "Meet our terms to-day or it's all off."

Redman considered slowly. "I haven't enough cash to take up the mortgage to-day. What arrangements do you suggest?"

"Make out a new mortgage to Mr. Vogt," advised Dave.

"I'll do that," assented Redman eagerly.

"And pay Mr. Vogt a cash bonus and certain other valuable considerations for waiving his right to foreclose."

"Cash bonus? What do you mean? How much cash bonus? What valuable considerations?"

The young attorney turned to his first client. "Peter," he asked, "if you weren't rich, how much money could you live on for a year?"

Peter calculated painfully. "I never spent five hundred dollars a year yet."

"Then you could live ten years for five thousand dollars without working?"

Peter nodded.

"Mr. Vogt will accept a cash bonus of five thousand dollars and a deed to the house and lot he recently occupied as your tenant. In return, he is willing to renew your old mortgage for one year."

Redman reluctantly agreed.

Not more than an hour later Peter, on the advice of counsel, gravely presented five thousand dollars in cash to Mrs. Peter, and that old lady, with some misgivings, intrusted the amount to the cashier of our bank, where it was to rest in a savings account, with interest at three and one-half per cent per annum.

The next day Peter received another telegram. It was signed by Vreeman & Vrooman, attorneys, Amsterdam, and read:

Later will discovered. Estate left to charity. Your name not mentioned.

In the bankruptcy proceedings which took place in the local civil court, David Butler appeared as counsel for Peter Vogt. It was discovered that Mr. Vogt had liabilities to the extent of $100,026.80. The four figures to the right represent moneys expended for wardrobe and hotel accommodations. The remainder was in the shape of a note held by Judge Cove. His assets consisted of a mortgage on the tannery for $40,000 and interest.

Judge Cove, being the principal creditor, was awarded the mortgage on the tannery to satisfy his claim.

When the proceedings were all over David Butler made a business call one evening on the Vogts, now comfortably reëstablished in their own home.

After he had tripped over the string stretched across the path and had successfully dodged the wash boiler as it descended eagerly from the roof, he was admitted.

Peter was reading the jokes in a patent-medicine almanac and translating them into Dutch for Mrs. Peter, who doesn't understand very much English. Patent-medicine comedy sounds funnier in Dutch anyway.

"Peter," said the attorney, "I've brought you a little bill."

"That's good," Peter exclaimed, beaming upon his friend. "Whatever you charge, it is worth it to get even with old Redman. How much do we owe you for legal advice?"

"Not a thing for legal advice," replied Dave, smiling. "This bill is for cablegrams. It cost just ten dollars to send both of them."

A TRIBUTE TO WALTER JOHNSON

"STUFFY" McINNES, who plays first base in a consistently successful style for the Athletics, gives this explanation of why his batting average against Walter Johnson, famous pitcher for the Washington team, is one of the best in the league:

"It is a peculiarity of mine that I can hit a fast ball with more ease and certainty than I can a slow one. When Walter is pitching, I stand at the plate, put my trust in Providence, and let my bat swing through the air. The result is that I have had good luck with Johnson. When all is said and done, however, Walter is the greatest pitcher in the world."

A Chat With You

ANYTHING worth while is worth waiting for, and, what is more, you generally have to wait for it. For a long time we have been in almost daily receipt of letters requesting another complete novel from the pen of B. M. Bower, and we could only reply that we would publish the novel as soon as it was written. The novel has arrived at last—it is a regular B. M. Bower novel, like "Lonesome Land" or "The Uphill Climb" or "Good Indian"—and you are going to get it complete in a single issue of THE POPULAR—the next, out two weeks from to-day. Since B. M. Bower wrote "Chip of the Flying U," the West, so brilliantly described in the Bower stories, has changed a great deal. What was true of it then is no longer true now. The open range, where branded cattle herded, the unexplored, unspoiled hills, the boundless freedom and the carelessness of the earlier day has gone forever. At some seasons, and in some periods, time moves slowly, but in our own West it moves fast, indeed. Historians say that thirty years sums up the activity of the average generation. Scarce a third of that time has passed since "Chip" was written, but the change in the country where Chip lived is more than has taken place in a century in most places.

IT is a mistake to think that the coming of civilization destroys romance and adventure. Things look a little more interesting and picturesque after we have passed them for the simple reason that we can see the woods better when there aren't so many trees to shut off the view. There isn't a doubt that some future Thackeray or Scott will be writing historical novels about these times in which we live, and that future readers, yet unborn, will be sighing for the good old swashbuckling days of the subway and the Erie Railroad and before the Panama Canal had been thrown open and destroyed all romance. The hard thing to do in fiction, and the most interesting thing, is to find the adventure, the mystery, and romance of the life of to-day, and this is what B. M. Bower has done in "The Spook Hills Mystery." There are ranches in the West yet, and you'll visit a ranch of to-day when you read "The Spook Hills Mystery." There are also sheepmen in the West, and you'll meet a lot of them in the new Bower novel. The struggles, the heartburnings, the stress of adventure, and the thrill of the big dramatic moment are all there—but it is a new sort of drama, a new sort of charm and mystery—and just as powerful and absorbing as the old kind. The cow-punchers are the same old lot, but they are working under different conditions. There's a new and most interesting sort of hero—and there's a girl of an entirely new stamp. To say that you will be interested in her is putting it mildly. Altogether "The Spook Hills Mystery" is the sort of novel you look for in THE POPULAR, with something new and unexpected added.

IF you remember the story published recently by Robert Welles Ritchie, "The Cat and the King," you will be glad to know that there is another tale by the same author and about the same people in the next issue of the magazine. It is called "The Great Cardinal Seal." If the West is a changeful land, the East is a changeless, and, of all the East, the most mysterious and most ancient in atmosphere and custom is Korea. China is commonly supposed to be a conservative country, but compared to Korea, China is a giddy whirligig of advance and progression. Mr. Ritchie is one of the few Americans who lived in Korea and know it. He has moreover the rare gift of visualizing his impressions and bringing the reader into the air and atmosphere of the place he writes about. In addition to this, he knows a good story and knows how to tell it when he finds it. All his stories are taken direct from life itself. The quest of the Americans who go to seek the great seal that must be placed on the peace treaty, the Russian prince who wants to take the seal to the Hague peace conference, the American girl who plays such a prominent part in the intrigue, and last, but not least, the musty, yet human, old King of Korea—these are a few of the elements that go to make "The Great Cardinal Seal" an unusual and brilliant story.

YOU will find the next issue of THE POPULAR a magic carpet, that will take you instantaneously to whatever part of the world your fancy lists. From the Western ranches to the immemorial graveyards of Korea, and from there to the wooded slopes of the Belgian Ardennes—the turning of a page is enough to complete the journey. If you have already read the first installment of "The Conflict," you know, without our telling you, that THE POPULAR has secured the first big and authentic story of the war in Europe to be published anywhere in any magazine. The story gets better as it progresses. It is a picture painted on a big canvas, and aside from the drama of the characters involved, Count Hollman and Morgan and Charlotte, it gives us startling and vivid flashes of that greater drama that is at present shaking the world.

THERE are a lot of other good things in the next issue of THE POPULAR. Julius G. Furthmann's story of the hard-rock men, "Fire in the Heading," is big enough and strong enough to be the principal feature in any fiction magazine. Henry Carr's story, entitled "High Art and the Lowbrows," is one of the best short stories of the prize ring we have ever seen published anywhere, and we have read most of them. "My Friend the Enemy," by Robert J. Pearsall, is a strong and vivid story of army life, and "The Master of the Moose Horn," by Theodore Goodridge Roberts, is a romance of the north woods worth reading and remembering. There is another detective story, "High Seas," by Wells Hastings, in which Shawn, the instructor in the maxixe and tango, plays a leading part, and another splendid railroad story by Frank L. Packard.

WE don't like to continue to say the next issue of THE POPULAR is the best we ever sent to press. We would like to make a continuous, undeviating improvement, but we know that this is not always possible. What we do know, however, is that the next issue is as good as any we have put together, and, what is more, is a great deal better than any other magazine you can get on the news stands, in the quality, strength, and variety of its contents.

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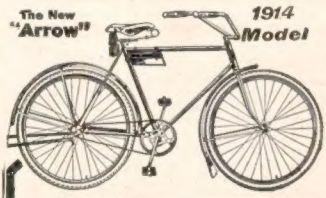

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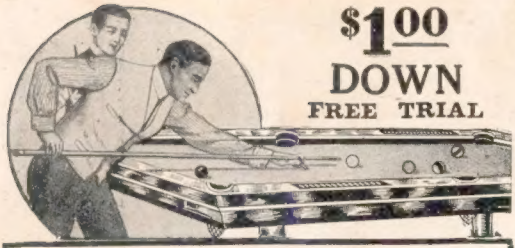

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